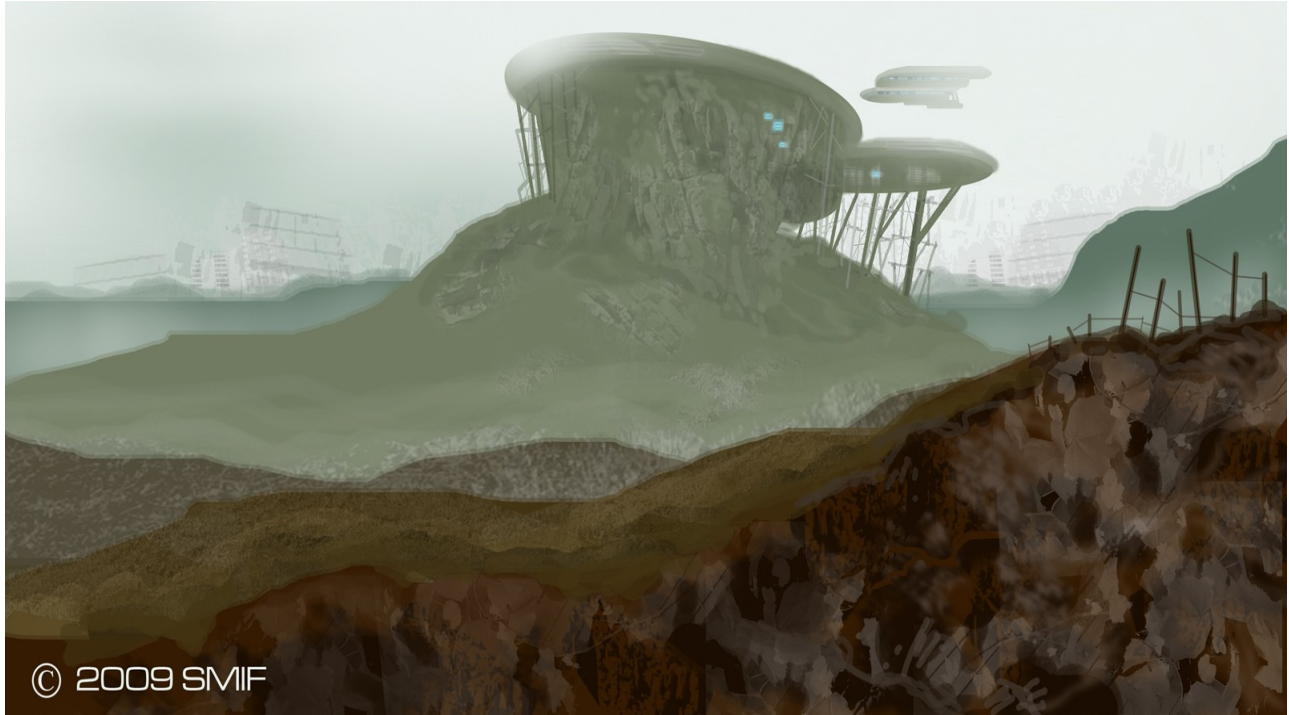


RPG REVIEW

Issue #5, September 2009



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***The Art & Imagination of Dan Smith ...
GURPS Krononauts ... GURPS
Languages ... New World of Darkness
Reviewed ... NWoD BrisVegas Story ...
Retrospective: Swordbearer and Heroes
of Olympus ... Paranoia Travel and
Transport ... Reliance on NPCs ...
Metagaming, Diegesis and
Anachronisms ... District 9 Review ...
Lord Orcus Listens! ... Industry News***

Table of Contents

<i>Administrivia and Editorial</i>	<i>many contributors</i>	<i>p2-3</i>
<i>Letters: The Young Gods Legal Debate</i>	<i>with Alex Bialy</i>	<i>p3-7</i>
<i>Hot Gossip: Industry News</i>	<i>by Wu Mingshi</i>	<i>p8</i>
<i>The Art and Imagination of Dan Smith</i>	<i>with Dan Smith</i>	<i>p9-11</i>
<i>New World of Darkness: Reviewed</i>	<i>by Sam Sexton</i>	<i>p12-14</i>
<i>New World of Darkness: Bris Vegas</i>	<i>by Sam Sexton</i>	<i>p15-17</i>
<i>Retrospective: Swordbearer and Heroes of Olympus - The Odyssey</i>	<i>by Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>p18-28</i>
<i>GURPS: Krononauts; Transhumanists and Time Travel</i>	<i>by Karl Brown</i>	<i>p29-31</i>
<i>GURPS: Languages</i>	<i>by Michael Cole</i>	<i>p32-42</i>
<i>Paranoia: Travel and Transport</i>	<i>by Brendan Evans</i>	<i>p43-46</i>
<i>Reliance on NPCs</i>	<i>by Sean Nittner</i>	<i>p47-48</i>
<i>Via Negativa II: Metagaming, Anachronisms and Diegesis</i>	<i>by Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>p49-53</i>
<i>Computer/Console Game Review: Fallout 3</i>	<i>by Andy Astruc</i>	<i>p54-56</i>
<i>District 9</i>	<i>by Andrew Moshos</i>	<i>p57-59</i>
<i>Lord Orcus Listens!</i>	<i>by Steve Saunders</i>	<i>p60-63</i>
<i>Next Issue</i>	<i>by Many People!</i>	<i>p64</i>

ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL

If there is one minor disappointment I have with this volunteer journal is the restrictions that I implemented myself. Such as the rule that each issue will be 64 pages and it will come out quarterly. It is a rather old-fashioned approach that harkens back to the day when publications were actually printed and things like length and time of a publication actually mattered in a physical sense. In that sense I know that I'm being terribly old-fashioned. Today, a more appropriate approach to the technology would be to publish on receipt in a 'blog-like format, open up each article to discussion through commentary threads, and reduce any concerns that I have about the size of the publication. There are certainly advantages to this approach. For starters it would mean that several articles which are piling up in the background could be published (not the least being *Insectes & Compagnie*, which was promised for this issue, but alas, the translation is still not complete.).

What we do have in this issue is another excellent collection of material for our volunteer contributors to our volunteer 'zine. I am particularly happy to welcome Sam Sexton, Sean Nittner and Andy Astruc who are newcomers whose names grace these pages for the first time. Sam has introduced me to an old favourite line in roleplaying games, the World of Darkness series. Whilst not having the same invigorating effect on the hobby as the original edition, it must be stated that the new edition has fixed quite a few glitches in the mechanics, has engaged in significant effort to integrate thematic considerations into the game system, and is physically a very highly quality publication.

Sean's contribution falls in that broad caveat of RPG theory and practise. I've been following his 'actual play' posts on his 'blog for sometime and have been very impressed to his serious dedication to 'making games work'. The contribution in this issue 'Reliance on NPCs' I hope will be the first of many.

Our third newcomer, Andy Astruc, will be providing regular video/console game reports as he does for New Zealand's major newspaper, *Dominion Post*. Yes, I guess that's where a large part of our hobby lives these days. "Take your dice grandpa", as one of my fellow gamers remarked with some degree of accuracy. It is true, my playing of video games is slight (although I do confess a particular love for *Manhunt* and *Left For Dead*), and there's only a handful of computer RPG games that I've played all the way through (*Nethack*, *Wizardry*, *Ulima V*, *Sword of Aragon*, *Baldur's Gate I & II*, *The Icewind Dale* trilogy). I've barely touched MUDs and I've never joined an MMORPG (which, to be honest, is a MUD with a pretty skin). So hopefully Andy will be add some young knowledge to this "old man" editor.

The feature interview in this issue is Dan "Smif" Smith, famous for his excellent illustrations in the 1990s and 2000s. I'm particularly happy to find Dan again and thank him for the work he did with material that I had published through ICE in the early 90s. I was very happy with his work then, and I am happier now for actually being able to give a long overdue 'thank you'.

Regular contributor Wu Mingshi is taking a break this issue, but swears she will return to give her overview of industry news and invites any with hot gossip on the subject to contact her. The ever-reliable dynamic duo Karl Brown and Michael Cole provide a GURPS article each, Brendan Evans contributes another piece for his favourite parallel reality, Paranoia, and with his eye firmly glued to the big screen Andrew Moshos has another movie review. Our local artist Jensen Schmidt once again does an excellent job with his numerous and appropriate illustrations (his ability to second-guess what articles are going in is... disconcerting and pleasing at the same time). Finally, and by no means least, Steve Saunders ventures into the nether regions for the words of wisdom from Lord Orcus.

But let us start with some letters than have been received....

Happy gaming,

Lev

LETTERS

Re: YOUNG GODS
Trademark Registration No. 2,106,550

Dear Mr Lafayette:

This is Alex Bialy, Windsor-Smith Studio manager.

This is to inform you that YOUNG GODS is a registered trademark of Barry Windsor-Smith.

We have recently been made aware of your article YOUNG GODS: A SUPERHERO CAMPAIGN USING CHAMPIONS, AND VARIOUS D&D SUPPLEMENTS

3 RPG REVIEW ISSUE FIVE September 2009

Please discontinue use of the title YOUNG GODS, as it infringes on Mr. Windsor-Smith's trademarked property.

Sincerely,

Alex Bialy

cc:

G. Brainerd; Trademark Office, Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp LLP

--

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[Nota bene: Such confidentiality clauses have no legal standing whatsoever. If someone sends you an email, by intention or accident, you are free to distribute it as you wish. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. So I tried to respond simply to this email... It bounced as follows]

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A message that you sent could not be delivered to one or more of its recipients. This is a permanent error. The following address(es) failed:

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host modusgate1.thebiz.net [206.72.209.47]: 521 This system is configured to reject mail from 202.191.61.216

----- This is a copy of the message, including all the headers. -----

Dear Mr. Baily,

There is no trademark infringement involved and nor would any be intended.

Yours sincerely,

Lev Lafayette

But he keeps trying... running this odious line that the use of a pre-existing phrase in a genre with nothing to do with his somehow constitutes a trademark infringement, despite clear statements in our journal to the contrary.

Dear Mr. Lafayette,

My letter was sent to you as a courtesy to notify you that YOUNG GODS is a registered trademark, and that your use of it is an infringement.

As is also the case with Orang Utan Comics (represented by your poster idsharman), continued use of Mr. Windsor Smith's trademark would only lead to increasing liability on your part. We're just protecting his intellectual property,

4 RPG REVIEW ISSUE FIVE September 2009

and trying to save all of us further conflicts down the line.

I find it hard to believe that if either you or Orang Utan Comics had gone to the effort of creating an original title, and making the investment to research and secure the trademark for it, that you would not protect it against infringement yourselves.

If you had chosen to publish my e-mail in addition to your reply, then the public could see that it was entirely polite and non-threatening. Certainly nothing to justify your copping an attitude.

And our server is not "configured" to reject correspondence from yours. It was down for 2 1/2 days , apparently including the time you sent your response.

Sincerely,

Alex Bialy
Windsor-Smith Studio --

Let this be the final discussion in this topic - anything else will have to go through legal channels. I am happy and willing to take this matter through the courts in the public interest.

Well Alex, I have chosen to publish your emails as requested. I do refer to the SMTP error message concerning your server's configuration. "SMTP error from remote mail server after initial connection: host modusgate1.thebiz.net [206.72.209.47]: 521 This system is configured to reject mail from 202.191.61.216 ". Perhaps by being "down" you mean that it was configured to reject email from everybody, but that does not change the veracity of the message.

Apparently you "find it hard to believe that if either you or Orang Utan Comics had gone to the effort of creating an original title". **An original title!** Gales of laughter can be heard around the planet at this degree of ignorance or arrogance of this assertion.

The phrase "Young Gods" has been part of studies in mythology and religion for over one hundred years, typically juxtaposed by the term "Elder Gods". It appears in Quispel's *Studies in Gnosticism and the Hellenic Religion* (1981), distinguishing the division of labour between the contemporary pantheon and the demiurge. The Irish poet and mystic, Ella Young describes the world being blessed by the Young Gods in her autobiography *Flowering Dusk* (1945). *The Young Gods* was the title of Peter Austen's 1919 book about Australians in the first World War. Jules Michelet uses the phrase throughout his classic description of Hellenic, Near-Eastern and Persian religion in the classic study *The Bible of Humanity* (1877). Indeed, there are hundreds of references in print which make use of the term in a manner identical to the article in the issue #4 of *RPG Review*. This claim that Windsor-Smith studios has some special right over this phrase deserves to be treated with the sort of contempt that one would treat DC comics with if they tried the same on the phrase "Superman".

Even something as trivial as typing "Young Gods" into a major search engine reveals how utterly unoriginal the phrase is. Most of the immediate references are to a rather well-known group of industrial musicians of said phrase, themselves deriving the name from a the EP precursor post-punk group "The Swans". A mighty fine band the Young Gods were too, as I spent quite some time listening to their music in early 90s. Surely, Mr. Windsor-Smith would be aware of the Young Gods of Marvel Comics, created by Gerry Conway and John Buscema, who made their first appearance in Thor #203 (September 1972) - especially given he was working for Marvel at the time!

Image from: Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, "Conventional Iconoclasm: The Cultural Work of the Nietzsche Image in Twentieth-Century America", *The Journal of American History*, Volume 93: No 3., December 2006.

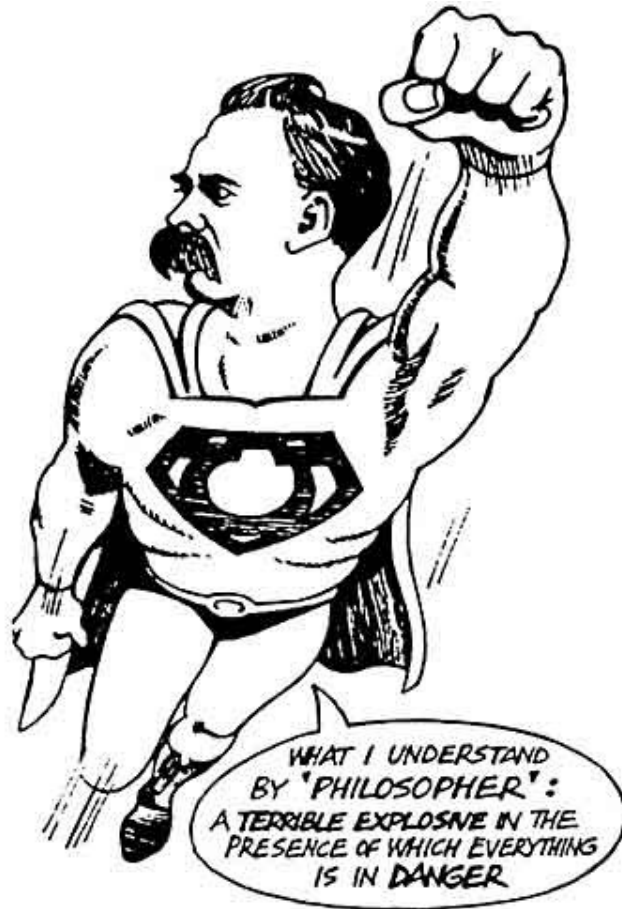
"I teach you the superman. Man is something that shall be surpassed. What have you done to surpass him? All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the superman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment." (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)

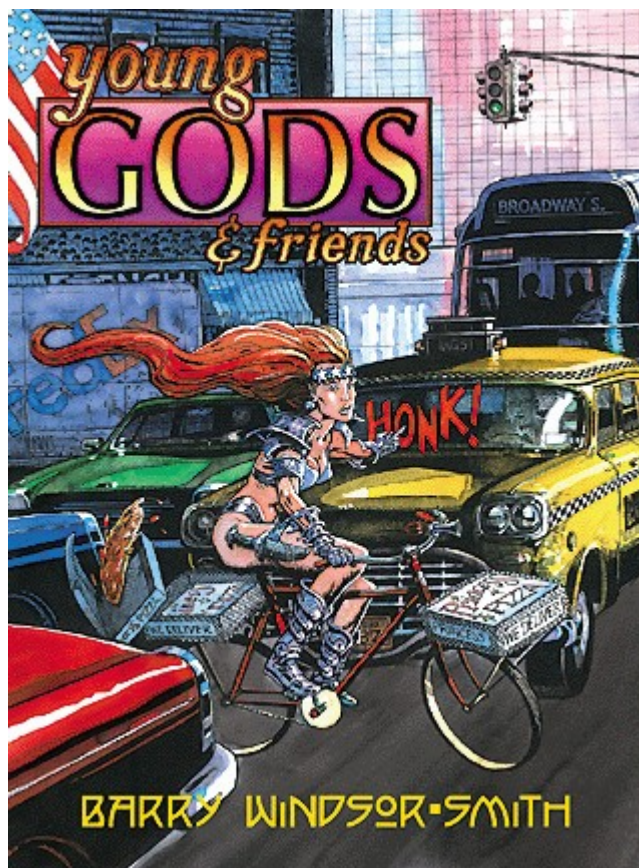
But on matters of such aesthetic credibility, let us look at "Young Gods" by Barry Windsor-Smith an illustrator I must say, I had no previous knowledge of until these recent events. Certainly he has some competence in drawing, much more than I. My skills in that area are indeed sorely lacking. Indeed upon my discovery of his work, I mused at the possibility of some co-operation in drawing and writing and publicly expressed such comments. Sadly it seems he has chosen his business associates very poorly indeed. Almost as bad as the storyline attached - the following synopsis from the product description .

One of the most eagerly-anticipated graphic novels of the last several years: a lively, character-driven graphic narrative set in a sci-fi/fantasy milieu. While bearing a superficial resemblance to Marvel Comics' *The Mighty Thor*, a 1960s series by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the story and characters of *Young GODS & Friends* are sexy, ribald, politically incorrect, and outrageously funny. On the evening prior to a spectacular galaxy-spanning wedding, the reluctant groom, Prince Heros, son of Otan, Ruler of All-Worlds, needs one last adventure before succumbing to life in a marriage of convenience and political intrigue. With his boyhood friend and cousin Strangehands, Heros of All-Worlds sets off across the Abraxus Nebula for a night of innocent adventure, recreating their childhood passion for "dragon chasing." Amusing circumstances dictate that the royally gorgeous yet foul-mouthed spitfire Princess Adastra, older sister of the bride-to-be Celestra of Orgasma, shall be coming along for the dragon ride that, through the mysteries of time and space, lasts considerably longer than just one night. Thus begins this odyssey of three errant gods with entirely mismatched goals and personalities seeking fun across the universe.

Let's face it, that is a *stupid* story. It shows all the imagination of a rather dim junior high-school student who has never been exposed to anything challenging and has rather fed on a diet of some popular culture and mainstream superhero comics before progressing to soft porn. As other reviewers (e.g., Michael Vance in *Rambles*, August 2004) have noted it lacks narrative rhythm ("Windsor-Smith's self-proclaimed character-driven story ... wandered aimlessly"), the themes are trivial, there is no motif worth speaking about, and even the major characters are one-dimensional. Stylistically, it is renowned for being simply awful ("[is] meandering, purple prose and stilted dialogue homage to Kirby or simply Smith at his best?"). Even the front-cover "features" a scantily clad red-head in an improbable, but titillating costume trying to deliver pizza. Because, you know, it's hard being a "young god", you just can't turn water in wine or feed five thousand from a few loaves and fishes like the stories say a real Young God actually did, at least according to religious mythology. Now compare this with a summary of the plot for "Young Gods" as a roleplaying story..

Characters are from an actual polytheist historical background with diversity encouraged. The characters must not choose a preexisting deity, instead they should choose a child or creation from an existing God. The core motivation for the PCs coming together is to form an new, multicultural alliance with a universal morality that transcends cultural contexts. Tired of such conflicts between their differing bodies of worshipers, some of the "young Gods" have noticed that there are good and bad individuals in all cultures and that nationalistic loyalties are allowing wickedness to spread.





In this universe, the various planes are not located according to alignment and nor are individual deities located as such. Rather deities of all moral and legal alignments will be found in whatever place is appropriate for them; the plane of Olympus, for example, will be home for Zeus, Hecate and Dionysus.

The first few scenarios should be a bit of a potted tour of the different planes of existence using various mythic tales as example stories and settings for the characters to participate in (for example, the Odyssey, Beowulf, the Ramayana etc). An cultural antagonist who holds a position of power and respect in the relevant plane of existence is a particularly good choice, especially as they will accuse a related PC of engaging in treason against their nationality. If possible the solution to a particular scenarios problem should be something that goes against a culturally specific virtue (e.g., A Norse superhero requiring humility, A Chinese superhero having to disrespect their elders etc).

After several adventures the PCs should begin to become sufficiently well known that the plot can move from a more episodic travel tour to one of a increasing narrative trajectory. This should occur in a manner that seems as natural as possible. The most exciting discovery towards the end of second plot arc is the discovery that two new planes of existence are beginning to form; one of universal good "positive" energy, and one that denies this virtue and prefers a conflict between national values, a "negative" plane of energy. The penultimate plot arc should begin with an increasing concentration of forces between "good" and "evil" and exploration of the powers of the positive material plane on the behalf of the PCs. Whilst this is occurring, changes will also be occurring on earth. Human prophets, philosophers and religious thinkers (e.g., Amos, Socrates, Siddhartha Guatama) also begin to argue in favour of universal principles and against nationally bound loyalties.

The final plot development involves two related instances; first there is a universalistic human who refuses to reject accusations that he has become a god and second is the literal disappearance of the polytheistic planes of existence in favour of a growing prime and negative material plane. The discovery that the PCs have, inadvertently, set in motion the destruction of their own homes, friends, families and existence is no doubt one that should be played over several sessions at least. How this concludes is certainly up to the individual stories. Perhaps some of the gods will have to be integrated and converted to mere sainthood (e.g., Bridgit of Kildare). Maybe others will find hidden pocket planes where a small coven of worshipers on earth continue the necessary worship to maintain their god's supernatural status. Inevitably the PCs will, however, have to deal with the fact that their advocacy of the universal has transcended the power of the contextual and as such, they have been both the harbingers of destruction and midwives to a new age.

As a parting shot, a GM may decide if the PCs integrate themselves in the new planes of existence they may even find the seed of its destruction; somewhere, down below on the prime material plane, a tiny group of atheists is meeting for the first time...

I leave it to the reader to do the comparison between the two for character development, consistency of the setting and richness of the narrative.

Mr. Bialy, I do recommend that you give up this risible campaign. You are simply bringing discredit to the aging Mr. Windsor-Smith who could probably do without such nonsense. Threatening a non-commercial fan publication such as *RPG Review* with legal action over a intellectual property claim from a phrase in common usage just makes you look like a school bully with the commonly associated reasoning powers of such a class of person. One thing that school bullies sometimes discover - sometimes it is simply not worth picking a fight with someone who will fight back and are surprisingly stronger than the would-be bully might think.

The young Gods, the free Gods, when earth was scarce begun Rushed in the might ... Oh, these were the Gods, young Gods in all their glory, And they danced.. From: "The Death of the Young Gods", The Yale Literary Magazine, Volume 80, October 1914, p11

Hot Gossip Industry News

by Wu Mingshi

Hosei Bo Mr. Lev,

So you very the late again, lah? At least it gives Minshi another few day to write her article - and good new on all your new contributors! Just make sure that you late for your own funeral, OK? This Mingshi's not Taoist path to immortality.

RPG Review better pay attention to recent decision by U.S. Federal Trade Commission. Online reviewers apparently now must disclose freebies or payments and reviews must reflect typical results. Maybe not so much a problem here. Maybe a problem for other people, and much talk cock [Ed: Mingshi! Oh, wait...] over these good intentions.

Big event in the last quartering is release of Pathfinder Core Rulebook which may become the heir of D&D3.5. Mingshi expects a thorough review in next issue! On this topic Mingshi also sees funny game called 'The Magpie Codex' by Paul Jessup. It like D&D old-school as tcher used to say with all skills tests called Feats, which are like Saving Throws. If you confused, don't be. It the very easy game, only 100 pages.

Also Moon Design reports that following the multi-genre edition of HeroQuest, Glorantha fans need not fear for very soon Sartar: Kingdom of Heroes (and Ducks, Mingshi adds), is coming very soon.

Fantasy Flight Games has a new edition of Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay coming soon with some very interesting dice which apparently create the story as you roll them. There is Characteristic Dice, Reckless Dice, Conservative Dice, Fortune Dice, Expertise Dice, Misfortune Dice and Challenge Dice. Interesting! Different! Maybe it works!



One special publication that Mingshi has set eyes upon is Alderac Entertainment Group "Ultimate Toolbox" for fantasy RPGs. By Toolbox they mean a mug more charts than Rolemaster (Mingshi means this - there are over 1,000 tables) for everything you need designed for any system. All useful things, like Wordbuilding, Dungeons, Plot Ideas, Names, Taverns. You name the Toolbox has it! Kilat!

OK, that's enough from me this quartering!

Mingshi xxx minshi@rpgreview.net

The Art and Imagination of Dan Smith



Welcome to RPG Review and thank you for agreeing to this interview Dan.

My pleasure, Lev, thanks for asking.

Your illustrative work in the RPG hobby, distinguished by the 'SMIF' signature, and you certainly have had quite a run in the industry; Steve Jackson Games, Iron Crown Enterprises, Eden Studios, AEG, FASA, Wizards of the Coast and Cumberland among others. I'm having a little trouble keeping track! Can you give us a summary of work that you did in the RPG hobby? Are you working for anyone at the moment?

My first rpg job was for SJG's GURPS:ULTRATECH. My wife said to me "Why aren't you doing the art for the games you're playing?" I couldn't answer that, so I gave it a try. It was a proud moment when I had the

book in my hands. For SJG I did ADQ, lots of GURPS books, INWO, DINO HUNT and most of the PYRAMID issues. FASA had me do some BATTLETECH and SHADOWRUN books. For WHITE WOLF, Vampire, Werewolf, Mage, JYHAD and I did one of the major arcans for the Mage Tarot deck. BTRC had me for Macho Women w/Guns, EDEN productions, the HACK card game, XXXENOPHILE for Foglio Studios, ICE used me for Silent Death, Rolemaster, Heromaster, Bassmaster...just kidding...this is hard as I didn't keep track of all the titles I worked on, being too busy doing the work. I'm sure I've missed folks and I apologize for that... My favorite projects were my personal card games, Battle of the Bands: the Rock and Roll Card Game and it's expansion Backstage Pass, and the 2 Portable Adventure card games, The Lair of the Rat-King and 8th Grade.

I did a card game (designed the look) recently for Bucephalus games, but mostly I have been working behind the scenes with Hyperwerks on upcoming toy/card game designs as well as comic book and animation projects. But when SJG calls, I always make room. ;)

Also you shared the 1997 Origins award with Jeff Koke and Derek Percy for Best Graphic Presentation of a Roleplaying Game. Do you consider the material in there your best work?

No. At the time, I was under a tight deadline and I was



scrambling. If I had to do it all over again, I would do some major pre production pieces to help keep me consistent. Altho' there are some pieces I do really like. I still love the great conflict between Good and Evil...Angels and Devils are always fun to draw!

Then there was a period with card and board games as well; Third World Games, including that delightful cover for Third World Game's "Lair of the Rat-King" and the "Battle of the Bands" cardgame.

Thanks. I Had an epiphany driving home from work one evening on what to do a game about. I was bored with the "I kill you or I steal all of your stuff" card games out there and I wanted to do a game that was fun, social and even if you didn't win, you loved the game. Battle o the Bands came from that. I had some other card games that I realized the BotB engine would be good for as a multi-genre type of card game (The first, thank you!), and that's how Portable Adventures started.

I have about 10 different card games residing in my computer at the moment, and I will be producing them in limited quantities in the future, when time allows.

I also understand that you've done a fair amount of artwork in the console game hobby with Nintendo and Namco as well. Can you elaborate on what you've done there?

I was a texture artist/3d modeller at Mass Media, working on Bassmaster 2000, Hasbro's Game of Life, Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue and Cops (which unfortunately didn't see the light of day.) I recently did some contract work for



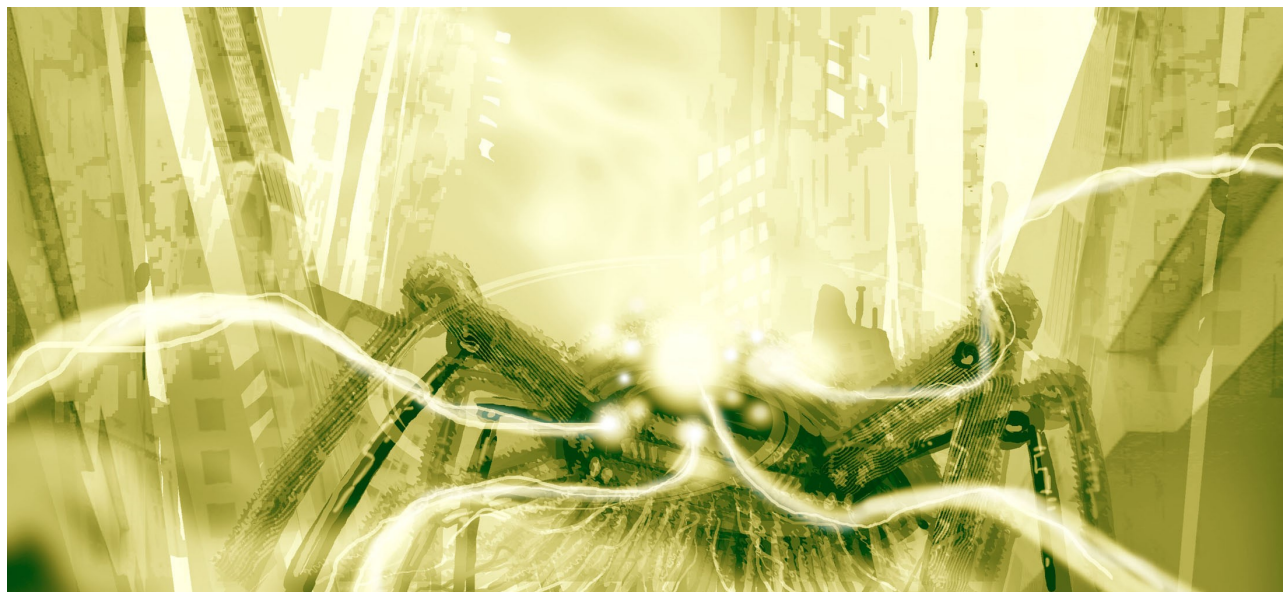
Papaya Studios as a storyboard artist/scriptwriter for Ben 10 and Disney's Midway Mania. I am doing concept art, and promotional art (recently for Yahoo!, Wonka Candies, and Madonna's Hard Candy tour.) more often than not.

So what games are you playing these days? Any medium will do; console, board, pen-n-paper RPG etc.

Usually mind games. :) I play card games with my son Dante, he's a card shark at 6 years old! Most of my spare time

would be designing games, not playing them per se.

I love GURPS. 1st-3rd edition. When that came out, that was THE system for me. It allowed my weirdness for genre mixing to shine. I also have a huge fondness for TSR's GAMMA WORLD. So many possibilities to use existing landmarks and twist them for plot's sake. I don't play computer games. I just don't have the time or interest. Weird, huh?



Your cartoon style is often quite detailed and I note there is a particularly emphasis on cyberpunk. Is that your favourite genre? Is there any others that you particular like or dislike?

My favorite genres are the wild west, post-apocalyptic, bent modern day...I usually genre mix like a mad man when I get into any kind of creative thought mode, be it gaming or personal illustration. Cyberpunk is fun, but I did so much of it back in the 90's, that I still cringe when I am asked to do something c-punky. Fantasy can be exciting, but usually it's old hat...most games that rely on "Kicking A\$\$" as it's main reason for being, bores me. I want to interact with the other players and the world. See what we can create as a group...

So why art for speculative fiction? What is it that draws you to this? Could "The Man" acquire your services for promoting evil rather than good?

Speculative fiction is good. Working on Spec is bad. ;) Spec fiction is great for working the mind with the "what if" factor. Drawing that kind of stuff is like a vacation for me. I welcome "the Man's" involvement with my bank account. I work for "the Man" all the time. (How's that? Was that okay?)

Any advice for budding young artists who want to get into this sort of illustrative work?

If you love it, really love to draw, then go to school, find other artists to bounce off of, take life drawing classes or draw your girl/boyfriend(s). Don't quit your day job, being an artist isn't an easy life...even for the big names out there. And always consider the source of any criticism, don't take it personally, unless it's personal-then it's not really about the art, is it? Keep an open mind. And an open heart, because someday, someone will come up to you and ask your opinion of their work...just like you did.

New World of Darkness Reviewed

by Sam Sexton

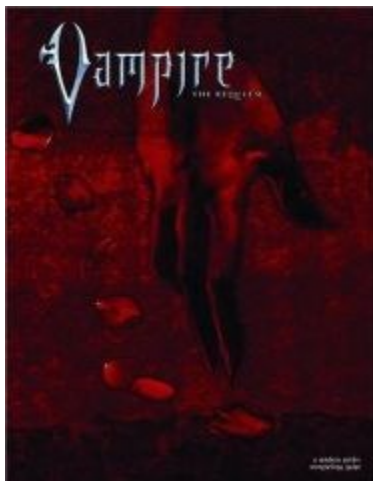
In 1991 Mark Rein-Hagen released 'Vampire: the Masquerade', the first in what is now known as the Old World of Darkness series. This went on to become one of the few role playing games that would transcend the darkened tables of dice rolling geeks and infiltrate every orifice of popular culture. Not only did it spawn an entire series of games, there was also a television show produced by Aaron Spelling, computer games, comics, novels, music compilations as well as accusations of inspiring devil worship and violent crime. It offered players the opportunity to throw off the tedium of endless medieval based sword and sorcery settings and play in a gothic punk version of here and now. And unlike other RPG's, Vampire: the Masquerade offered you the chance to play the monster.

In 2004 came the Day of Judgement, where the prophecies in each of the games came to fruition and ended the old world of darkness series. 2004 also saw the realise of World of Darkness and Vampire: The Requiem the first in the new series of world of darkness games. In this new series many of the problems of the old series were ironed out to create a smoother gaming system, it was relatively easy to use the different monster templates into one campaign. While at first the separation between the core gaming rules from the monster template may look like cynical money grabbing on behalf of White Wolf there is actually some logic to it. Other than freeing up space in each of the template books so that they can focus entirely on the monster, it also means that the core gaming rules are standardised throughout the entire series and really does make it easier when a Mage, a Hunter and a Changeling all decide to jump across the same rooftop.



Dark world games and settings

Vampire



Vampires in the new world of darkness now only fall into five clans Daeva, Gangrel, Mehket, Nosferatu and Ventrue. However these are also broken up in the numerous bloodlines which include most of the old favourites like Bruja, Malkovian and Toreador. Another change in Vampire has been the implementation of Vampire covenants each of whom are vying for power and each of whom offer the player more abilities. While these too are numerous the main ones are the Invictus the old order of vampire power, Lancea Sanctum the catholic church for vampires, Circle of the Crone who are very similar to Wiccans, the Ordu Dracal who follow in the footsteps of Vlad Dracul who according to the game found ways and means to offset or manage the vampire weakness (like the aversion to sunlight). These covenants pretty much replace the role that clans in the old world of darkness played, while the old clan power structure is there it is the covenants where the new power is and the most powerful covenant is one that controls the city.

Werewolf

Werewolf too the character creation has been simplified into five Auspice or phases of the moon under which your werewolf had his or her first change, then six different tribes Blood Talons, Bone Shadows, Hunters in Darkness, Iron Masters, Storm Lords and Ghost Wolves. Your werewolf can then be a part of a lodge, which like vampire covenants are werewolf societies each with a different philosophy on the struggles of your everyday Werewolf.

Promethean

Promethean is one of a new line of games that is being published for the new world of darkness. In this you are the creation whose very existence goes against nature. While Vampires, Werewolf's, changelings and mages are freaks and monsters they are still part of the natural order of things, Prometheans on the other hand are Frankenstein's monsters, golems and Pygmalions brought to life by another using stolen life and alchemy. Again like the other games they have types of Promethean or lineages, Frankenstein's monsters (the wretched), Galatea (muses), Osiris (Nepri), Tammuz (golems) and Ulang (the Riven). Each one of these are associated with a different element ie. Air, earth, fire ect. Your Promethean can then become associated with a metal refinement which gives them access to different powers and again has a different philosophy. However one of the parts that i like most about this game is that if a Promethean is to stay in an area too long the people will start to feel antagonism towards the character regardless of they have behaved. Eventually the Promethean will have to leave the town if he or she is lucky it will be before the mob with flaming torches and pitchforks chase them out. Promethean like vampires must fight to keep their humanity for like Pinocchio they may one day become a real boy.



Geist the Sin-Eaters

Recently white wolf have released Geist the Sin Eaters a game about people who have died and come back to life. Since I haven't managed to get a copy of this game yet here is a bit of what White Wolf say about the game on their web site.

A Storytelling game of Second Chances

Nothing informs life more than the shadow of death. Each appetite that sustains a living being is a counter-reaction to the inevitable end. Hunger is a warning of the death of starvation. Sexual drive is rooted in the instinct to leave offspring so that the bloodline may endure when the body has finally run down - and indeed sex itself has been called "the little death." Even our higher drives such as art and spirituality can be seen as a desire to find something that may outlast the death of the individual. The shadow of the Reaper is what gives life meaning.

In the World of Darkness, none are more keenly aware of this dichotomy than those who have died and returned to life. Not undead, not revenants, not ghosts - but living human beings who have been bound with ethereal chains to the forces of Death itself. They carry geists inside them, spectral shades that are more than ghosts. They are the Sin-Eaters, the keepers of the keys.

Geist is a game about their stories.

The biggest difference between the old WOD and new WOD is the fundamental dice rolling system. In the old system you would add the relevant attribute to the relevant skill and then that many dice hoping to get over a difficulty set by the story teller. In the new system the relevant attribute and skill are still added up only now the story teller adds or takes away dice depending on the various factors involved. The player then makes the roll and has to get an 8, 9 or 10 to succeed. Added to this is the 10 again rule, here for every 10 you roll the success is counted and you get to roll again and this continues until you stop rolling 10s. This allows even character with low stats the chance to get a massive success though sheer dumb luck. Also gone is the minus 1 rule, which could cause a reasonably powerful character with a reasonably high dice pool to fail on a reality simple task. Now 1's don't take away from the successes or cause a critical failure if there isn't any successes in the roll. Instead we have the chance dice here if a character's dice pool totals with other factors are taken into account adds up to 0 he or she gets to have a go anyway by putting all it up to chance here they can only succeed if they roll a 10 however if they roll a 1 they will get a critical failure and everything will go horribly wrong.

Over all in playing the game these changes have improved the gaming experience, however what has always made the old world of darkness a fantastic playing system is the natural internal conflict in the characters. Vampires and Werewolf have to hold themselves in check so as not to become raving monsters, Changelings and mages must maintain their grip on reality so as not to go completely insane. Fortunately this aspect of the old game has been maintained, for each and every template there is an eternal struggle both within the hidden society of monsters and within the monster themselves and this is really what is at the heart of The World Of Darkness. Vampires must struggle with themselves to keep the beast in check, changelings must fight for their sanity, while Mages must hang on to their wisdom and Werewolf's struggle to keep there harmony. While die-hard fans of the old world of darkness will lament the loss of aspects of the old system over all the changes have improved the gaming experience while keeping the essence of what was good within the game.

Murder in the Red Barn: A NWoD Scenario in Brisbane

by Sam Sexton

PCs: One Lebanese Vampire, Dantalion Fisk, emphasis on social skills. One Werewolf, Loius, part of the Paris Commune, shipped to Vanuatu, now in Austtalia and one Changeling, Bill, a former combat medic in Afghanistan. This unlikely trio has a common aim. PCs are "low level" with some experience (eg., 20 points). They have come together, with incredible interparty tension, because they have a common enemy; Carlos Fontaine a mage of some power.

The players are trapped in the back of a pig truck as the two people who were driving it are coming to investigate. One of the people is Carlos Fontaine the man who killed Lousis's pack, Fisk's ghoul and has something to do with Bill's abduction into the hedge. They have come to west of Brisbane, and the truck has pulled over by the side of the road. First they must make a willpower roll to see whether they have been paralysed by Carlos's magic if they have been paralysed then then will wake up in a red barn in a farm in middle of nowhere. If they resist then they can either attack Carlos and his apprentice and try and make their way back to the city.

Carlos has an amulet that will heal him two points of bashing every 2 rounds. Most of his magic relies on his arms being free. However he does not want to kill the players but may do so if he is wounded badly enough. He will try and paralysis them forcing them to make a will power roll. If they are in reaching distance he will try and use his staff.

Attack: 7 Defence: 4 Health: 13 Will power: 7

Death kill spell attacks the players with a storm of lightning bolts he will only cast this if he is on his last health point. The players must make a Wits/Dex roll and if they get under 3 Successes he will then do a point of aggravated damage for every success he get on a willpower roll.

Carlos's Apprentice

Attack: 5 Defence: 2 Health: 8 Will power: 6

Carlos's apprentice is armed with a machete and will attack the cloest person to his boss. However he will flee if they kill his boss.

Should they escape then they will have to make their way home. They do have mobiles and can call people to pick them up however there is a House with a big red barn over there and it looks like the sun is going to come up soon.

In the Red Barn. It is night and they awake the werewolf is in a silver lined with silver. The other two are simply manicured. The manicules have a difficulty of 5 to be damaged enough before they can be removed. The room is empty however there is a skylight that looks down on them, this has been blacked out to stop the sun coming in. There is a mirror on one side of the room. The room is lite by large fulence lights. On the other side of the mirror is Carlos's Apprentice and two zombies. There is also a large iron door which is strong enough to keep them in.

Zombies Attack: 7 Defence: 2 Health: 14

The zombies are pretty dumb and will not try and flee. After they have escaped though the mirror they will find them selfs in a large occult work shop, there are strange devices of all kinds some of which they make know on an occult roll as being doorways to other realms others they have no idea about.

Bill this room seems very familiar to you, you are sure that you have been here before. After they have searched the room. Should they make a successful search roll they may find a photograph discarded on the floor. It is of a young man and Carlos. There are large barn doors that lead outside and a smaller door that leads to another part of the building.

Behind this smaller door are small living quarters they would assume that this is where Carlos's Apprentice stays. Strewn around the room are dirty cloths, unwashed dishes, an epc and a small television. The walls are pretty much covered with all kinds of violent pornography the most violent are on the ceiling above the small bed. There is also a beaten up sex doll laying on the floor. Should they enter this room the doll will attack them.

Doll Attack: 4 Defence: 4 Health: 7

Should they search this room they may a box filled with dried ears and a bag containing a large vartiy of sharp objects. Outside the barn another pig shed to the south and to the east is a small white house, the door blocked and the can only enter through the eastern window. The pig shed is pretty much dedicated to pigs and has about 12 zombies wondering inside of it who will all join the battle if they enter. The pigs will also try and eat them should the get too close to the pens.

Pigs Attack:5 Defence: 1 Health: 5

Which will take them into the kitchen, which is the etipemy of a 50's country kitchen there is a lunch bag on the table. There is a two doors, one that leads to the living room and on that leads up stairs. In the living room they find a series of children's toys and Carlos sitting on a large recliner. Carlos will not do anything until they have fought off the toys which will attack them if they attack Carlos.

Toys 12 Attack: 6 Defence 1 Health 4

Should they beat the toys then Carlos will try and escape though the front door and into a sports car waiting outside. There is also a datsen blue bird and the truck that brought them in.

Dantalion and Louis are in the Barn, Louis is in the room trying to heal from fighting the doll, Bill is exploring the rest of the farm. They still have to go into the pig pen. The sun is about to come up and there are cracks in the barn that let enough sun that will cause Fisk some serious concern.

Once the sun has gone down a again a truck will arrive on the farm, this one is filled with sleeping people. Should any of them try and feed of these people they will take 1 point of ag for ever point they take. Also in the truck is the driver a mage couier named earl who is looking for payment and will not lift the protection he has put on the sleepers until he recives it. Should he be killed the sleepers will wake and attack anything they see.

People X 20 Attack: 5 Defence: 2 Health: 8

Earl Attack: 7 Defence: 4 Health: 8

He will also cast fire balls which the players will have to make a willpower roll to avoid getting damage.

Should they concince earl that they are not the ones who made the order and Carlos is dead then he will demand that they pay for the order. Since he is not interested n money he want them to take out a monster that has been taking children from his small town, he doesn't know who is behind it so therefore wants his connection in stoping it to remain hidden. The small town is Horn Swogga about 20km's south of Goose Creek.

Once they have made it there they must look into the kidnappings. They will find that where ever the children went

missing there a burnt patch on the ground. They will find this information if they raid the local police files or the files in the local newspaper. Should they wait up one night they will see a strange centipede like monsters roaming the streets. Should they attack these monsters they will try to paralyse them with a goo that turns the ground black.

Centipedes Attack: 7 Defence: 6 Health 8



They have to make a willpower roll every time the centipede tries to parley with them.

If they all get paralysed then they will be taken to the centipedes den. Here there are more centipeds and the children who are slowly being turned into centerpedes. They must fight way out. Through about 10 centipeds, they will also have to then go back and destroy the den which is undernigh in an old mine shaft which connect to the towns storm water drains. A series of structures are used to hold up the mine although it looks like the centerped's have burrowed further into the hill. Once they have done this they should return to Earl who will then return them to Brisbane. Or so they think...

Once inside his truck they will have to make a will power roll to stop themselves falling into a deep slumber. Should they remain awake they will find that they are not going to Brisbane after all but to a large disused mill in warwick. Here they will come face to face with Methious who is preparing an army to attack the night life of Brisbane. With this information they must escape and warn their kin in the big city.

Retrospective: Swordbearer and Heroes of Olympus Reviews and the Odyssey

by Lev Lafayette

Heroes of Olympus and Swordbearer are two RPGs authored by B. Dennis Sustare; they probably should have gone into the last issue of RPG Review which featured an interview and article by the designer (or maybe the one before with GURPS Bunnies & Burrows, the original also designed by Dennis), but they are here instead for this issue's Retrospective. RPG Review hosts the only known Swordbearer mailing list at: http://rpgreview.net/mailman/listinfo/swordbearer_rpgreview.net and would start a Heroes of Olympus list if sufficient interest is shown.

This Retrospective offers a brief review of the two games before moving into a scenario based on Homer's Odyssey that uses stats from both game systems. The map is taken from the excellent Timemaster scenario of the same story, "Whom Gods Destroy", which was an invaluable resource when designing the scenario. Note there is a small error in the map with regards to the scenario; the PCs start the adventure having looted the lands of the Kikonians and begin the land of the lotus-eaters.

The reviews are derived from Rachel Kronick (<http://www.rpg.net/reviews/archive/10/10785.phtml>), my own (<http://www.rpg.net/reviews/archive/13/13858.phtml>) and Ken Rolston (Dragon, Issue #71, March 1983) for Swordbearer and Papyrus (http://www.rpg.net/news+reviews/reviews/rev_2038.html) and Oliver Dickson's review (Different Worlds, Issue 30, September 1983).

Heroes of Olympus Review

With an very attractive cover, the Heroes of Olympus boxed set comes with a 54 page rule and scenario booklet with a rather unattractive small serif font, campaign and adventure maps, a number of chits to represent characters and things, and a copy of a "Different Worlds" magazine article for use in Chaosium's "Thieves World". The general setting is journey of the Argonauts and the interplay of men and Gods in that mythology.

Character generation is based around a 'hero', who has a number of randomly determined attributes. The character's father is, in all probability, a God or King, and the mother a Muse, Nymph or nobility. Parentage provides an appropriate bonus (Great Speed from Hermes), although there is a chance it will be a negative effect (lameness from Haphaestos). Heroes have 100 skill points to distribute among the 8 combat skills and 12 other skills of which 5 are great physical attributes. In addition Heroes get a number of skills at 'commoner' level, classed as 'A', 'B', or 'C', which we learn is the deduce of 20, 10 and 5 points when combat is described.

Combat itself requires the distribution of points by Hero characters in "Noble Combat" across Attack, Defense, Initiative and Trickery- the later representing a variety of special and descriptive maneuvers (e.g., crack limb, throw sand in eyes, grab weapon arm etc) with varying chances of success. The character with the highest Initiative goes first, if their Attack exceeds their opponents Defense the blow will land, and Trickery actions occur at a time depending on the maneuver. Damage is based on 1d6, modified by armour (or rather, lack thereof), the type of weapon and the presence of Great Strength in the character. Any damage subtracts from the character's Endurance, initially set at 20 and modified by Great Strength.

There are special rules for aerial and mounted/chariot combat, but great detail is applied, appropriately enough, to naval combat. Here is a full range of ship speed and movement based on wind effects, water currents and movement intentions (sail, row slow, row fast, row plus raise sails etc) and usage of the Seamanship ability. Rules are provided for

the grappling and boarding of ships, damage that occurs to such vessels and repair time needed.

Magic is strictly within the mythological flavour. The Olympians can intervene in worldly affairs according to their domain. Regions and items may have magical powers with particular artifacts aligned to a deity and thus with a deities magic (e.g., Winged Sandals from Hermes providing Speed). A selection of 36 spells (18 each) are available to followers Hecate and Hermes. There is a fair bit of descriptive material concerning the Gods, their places of worship and power, and their temples.

The section on non-humans describes familiar races (centaurs, fauns, satyrs and giants), little-seen races (cyclopes, seleni, nymphs, dryads, and pygmies), monsters (antaeus, cerberus, chimaera, dragon, gorgon, harpy, hydra, minotaur, pegasus, sea monsters and talos) before describing normal animals and plants, although wolves are a surprising omission from said list. Following this is the description of campaign play in general, including movement, navigations, the effects of seasonal weather and storms, the availability of food and water, and random encounters keyed to region types (e.g., civilised coast) and specific regions (e.g., Western Peloponnesus).

The rate of improvement for characters is determined by Gamemaster, based on how often the players participate. A general development of abilities is from ratings C, B, and A, then to the numerical values. A bonus of 1D6 skill points is awarded when a success is achieved but with the possibility of award highly varied according to the simplicity or difficulty of the challenge. As a different sort of 'improvement', this section also discusses healing rates; quite slow for characters of regular Endurance, quite rapid for those with Heroic levels and the effects of poison. Treasure is also described here, with an emphasis on physical items rather than coin and with contextual keying.

The Gamemaster section is quite short with sensible notes on the GM's role, running the game, scenario design and campaign design, and probability. Following this is four excellent and developed scenarios (including a particularly lengthy quest for the Golden Fleece) and three mini-scenarios where a single Hero takes on a monster.

Swordbearer Review

Swordbearer was published in two formats in 1982 and 1985 by Heritage and FGU respectively. The earlier version consisted of three booklets in B5 format and the latter as two books with cardstock covers in US-standard A4. The text, largely the work of B. Dennis Sustare, with Arnold Hendrick's assistance, is concise, clear and with excellent scope.

Attributes in Swordbearer are called "Categories". These include Mass, Agility, Intelligence, Age, Experience and Social Status, all of which are determined by random rolls, with Strength a subcategory of Mass, but declines with age at a different rate. Strength/Mass begins on 1d10+1d6+2. Agility, Intelligence and Social Status are determined by 2d10, Age on [2d10*2]+10, which determines the number of experience points received. Characteristic tests are made on 2d10 plus the appropriate category with sample difficulties of very easy (15), easy (18), average (21), hard (25) and very hard (28).

The equivalent of a "class" in Swordbearer is the Activity Sphere of which there are eight: Fighting, Stealth, Town, Country, Magic, Leadership, General Knowledge and Arts & Crafts. A character may have one or two spheres allocated, with an additional bonus of 1d6 experience if they just choose one. Specialised Spheres provide bonuses for determining initial skill levels, which are usually percentage based for a roll-under task resolution system and have category-based defaults (e.g., 'Mass' for the Drinking skill). Background experience can also provide further benefits; those who specialise in Stealth for example, may have items higher than normally allowed by their Social Status. The distribution of the 65-plus skills (not including specialisations) has a typical over-emphasis on weapon skills, with a separate specialisation for each weapon in both weapon use and weapon speed.

Mention must also be made here of Swordbearer's use of Social Status, Equipment and Encumbrance rules. Instead of keeping track of every gold or silver coin, a character in Swordbearer was assumed to have general equipment and

"household wealth" that would be normal for a particular Social Status and to which some description is provided. Treasures are described in terms of Social Status ratings as well and, if greater than the finder's existing Status.

Swordbearer's combat system is realistic and colourful. The timescale is usually in 4-second instants with ranges calculated on 2.5 feet paces. Actions are declared according to Combat Quickness (Intelligence plus Agility), lowest first allowing for quicker characters to react to declarations. After this, simultaneous movement occurs, weapon use according to order of the weapon speed skill, and finally any special actions. Characters are allowed 1 action per instant. Weapon use is a simple d100 roll-under check with modifiers, with allowance for fumbles and dual weapon use (half speed for each weapon). A defender may attempt to parry, but a weapon can only be used to strike and parry in the same instant if the weapon speed of the opponent is lower. Dodges require an abort of the normal action and a contest of agility. Shields automatically parry if the weapon speed of the shield is greater than the attacker's; if not a weapon use roll is required. However, all weapons (including shields) have a breakage number, which can occur through hits, parries and blocks. If this number is exceeded, a roll is made on one of three breakage results tables.

Wounds are determined by the weapon in question and modified for +1 damage for every 5 full points above the minimum strength required. Hit location is determined with a d10 roll with separate charts for humanoids, quadrupeds, lizards, insects, and winged targets. Armour subtracts from the damage received causing 'wound points'; if the wound points exceed a character's mass, they are killed instantly. If the accumulated number is greater than their mass, they collapse and are dying. If accumulated wound points in a single location is greater than half the character's mass, the location is disabled. If this amount is received in a single blow a serious disablement occurs which, along with fatal wounds that the character recovers from, results in a permanent effect to the location.

Swordbearer comes with an extremely evocative magic system based around elemental nodes and spiritual humours. Elemental magic is based on harnessing the power of essence 'nodes' of pure elemental power made manifest in the material world. There are seven elements (Fire, Metal, Crystal, Water, Wood, Wind, and Light/Darkness) which exist in a circle of dominance which can be used to chain-cast, which speeds the casting of spells. Discovery and identification of elemental nodes is a skill in its own right. Once discovered and identified a character must first attempt to contact the node, contain in it an appropriate reflection and then attempt to align it to an appropriate spell depending on which element it is, and the power of the essence node.

Casting elemental spells is a simple procedure; simply re-establish contact the node and think of the purpose, a process which takes one instant, but with a Combat Quickness of 0 (but higher if chain-cast through a circle of dominance). Range for all spells is line-of-sight. Nodes however may become consumed with each casting (a roll of 1 on 1d6) and the disadvantage of chain-casting is the multiple nodes can be lost. The rate of loss struck me as a little high; with a loss of a node in every 1 in 6 uses, then the quantity of nodes must be increased which in turn reduces the sense of magic in the discovery and identification of nodes. An alternative is to use the nodes to enchant an item, which significantly reduces the possibility of consumption (from approximately 16% down to less than 3%).

Spirit magic is based on four humours (vitriolic, phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic), an innate magic in the psychic realm. Spirit magic is found of two types based on the status of their inhabitant, living or dead. It is also possible to contact and contain dead spirit nodes through a complex rite, commonly through sacrifice.

The final two "chapters" of Swordbearer is a bestiary and GM advice. The former is simply split into sapient, sentient creatures and elementals. All creatures are provided with a full description of attributes and rate of decline, elemental and spiritual magic, any other special advantages and disadvantages, plus a descriptive piece which discusses habitat, environment, ecology and society. The Gamemaster's Guide is an excellent summary of preparation requirements and methods of ensuring player and character motivation. The notes on campaign worlds and mapping are fairly simple, but is extremely competent advice, especially for beginners. An exceptional travel, terrain, vegetation and visibility chart is provided for those who prefer the wide-ranging wilderness scenarios.

The Odyssey Scenario

The Odyssey is a sequel to the Iliad, describing the journey home of the Greek hero Odysseus following the fall of Troy. He ends up somewhat waylaid on the journey due to his own adventurous nature and interventions from the Gods (supported by Athena, opposed by Poseidon), and it ends up taking him ten years to reach his home Ithaca after the ten-year Trojan War. In his absence, Odysseus is assumed to have died, and his wife Penelope and son Telemachus (who is twenty at the time of Odysseus' return) must deal with a number of suitors. The story is written in *in media res* with the actual journey in a linear sense requiring reconstruction from the original text; an impressive example (albeit edited to non-adult sensibilities) of this was taken by Sandpoint High School as an out-of-school project for the University of Idaho Ed Tech Quest 2001. The Odyssey has often been remarked as a pivotal text in classic enlightenment thought as Odysseus uses cunning reason to get past most of his obstacles with supernatural powers tending to be a bane rather than a benefit.

Scene One: The Land of the Lotus Eaters

PCs are assumed to be members of Odysseus' crew having left the Trojan War victorious, in good spirits and with significant loot. Their captain, Odysseus, gained great renown during the war as one of the heroic leaders of the Greeks, along with Nestor and Idomeneus, and an advisor for Agamemnon advising him not to withdraw. During the campaign, Odysseus served to moderate the more forthright Achilles. When Achilles was slain in battle, it was Odysseus and Telamonian Ajax who retrieved Achilles's body and armour in the thick of the fighting. With Diomedes, Odysseus went to find Achilles's son, Pyrrhus, to come to give him his father's armour and aid in the Greek campaign. It was Odysseus and Diomedes who recovered the arrows of Heracles from Philoctetes. It was Odysseus and Diomedes who stole Palladium, the magical wooden statue of Pallas Athena, from Troy's citadel thus weakening the city's defenses. Finally, it was Odysseus who devised the strategy of the Trojan Horse, and it was he would lead the warriors from the trap.

Odysseus has travelled with a dozen ships with the intention of returning to Ithaca, but firstly raiding the lands of the Kikonians and their town of Ismara, as they supported the Trojans. Initially the raid was successful, with most of the Kikonian men slain, their goods pillaged and their women taken as slaves. However, against Odysseus' advice many of his men desire to stay overnight for feasting and the following day they are attacked by Kikonian reinforcements, losing six from each ship (seventy-two total) before retreating.

Soon after leaving the fleet was blown off course in a terrible storm and was washed ashore in a distant land. This is the lands of the Lotophagi, the Lotus-Eaters. Odysseus will assign the PCs to engage in a scouting mission along this community on the north-African shore. They soon encounter a settlement of the Lotophagi, natives of the land, led by Butehamun. The Lotophagi show hospitality to Odysseus' crew which, unfortunately, included the consumption of a blue lotus, a nourishing, soporific and psychedelic drug.

This test has multiple components; PCs who want to resist the offer of hospitality must make a plausible excuse on why they wish to do so as an implausible one will be treated as a great insult to the Lotophagi, and may even result in their warriors coming to the fore to capture the crewmembers, loot their ships etc. Those who do consume the lotus will find themselves thoroughly nourished, but also sleepy. Make a Drinking skill check (Swordbearer) or an Endurance percentage check (Heroes) to remain functional after consuming the lotus. If failed, the character falls asleep and has very lucid and pleasant dreams which involve their strongest attachments and desires. Another check is required to see if the character is addicted upon awakening; this can be an average characteristic test against Mass (Swordbearer) or an Endurance *3 check (Heroes). If the character's fail the test their greatest desire will be to remain with the Lotophagi, who will quite happily integrate them - and their loot - into their community. Somehow the other PCs must find a way of rescuing them.

Scene Two: Polyphemus, The Cyclopes

Escaping the lands of the Lotophagi, the fleet continues on its journey and stops at an rich wooded island of wild wheat,

barley, graps and a plentiful number of goats. With extremely short supplies, Odysseus stops at the island and selects a number of crewmembers, including the PCs, to collect supplies. At first this is quite successful, as a number of wild goats (nine for each ship, ten for Odysseus) is found and there is feasting and wine. Odysseus gets it into his head however to visit the Cyclopes, which are known to be nearby. They are known to be a wild people who do not till the soil and have no towns or villages, preferring to live in family groups on the hillsides. Odysseus wishes to discover whether they are "uncivilised savages, or a hospitable and human race".

Taking a group with him Odysseus finds on the face of a cliff near the sea, a great cave overhung with laurels and a station for a great number of sheep and goats. Inside there are cheeses, milk, and more lambs and kids. Some of the NPCs will argue for taking the food at this point; Odysseus still wishes to meet the owner. Others argue that a sacrifice be held to the Gods.

The Cyclopes returns, a massive and monstrous being, and the Greeks scatter and hide in the cave. The Cyclopes rolls a massive stone to close the entrance of the cave - "so huge that two and twenty strong four-wheeled waggons would not be enough to draw it from its place against the doorway" - which should give one an idea of the strength and size of the beast. The Cyclopes then engages the party in conversation, attempting to discern where their ships are located; regardless of the answer or any offers two NPCs will be grabbed, their heads smashed against the rocks, and the Cyclopes will eat them raw and completely.

A number of possible escapes are available. The traditional one is Odysseus giving the cyclopes some liquor and, having introduced himself as "Nobody" (a pun on the name 'Odysseus'), then building a great firey spear which the captured party drives into his eye. The Cyclopes calls out in pain and his neighbours come to find out what is wrong with Polyphemus crying out in the middle of the night. "Nobody has hurt me", he replies, which they interpret as a sickness of mind and depart. The following morning everyone escapes by tying themselves to the bellies of the sheep and although the Cyclopes feels the back of the ship all escape. Use an very hard check against Mass (Swordbearer) or Endurance *1 (Heroes) to simulate this - with success indicating the Cyclopes has noticed the character. Odysseus mocks the Cyclopes as they leave and Polyphemus declares he will bring the wrath of Poseidon upon him.

Of course, another method which PCs may be keen to try would be to fight the Cyclopes and his brethren. Moving the rock might be next to impossible however.

Cyclopes (Heroes) End: 100, Strength 100, Unarmoured. Club A, Wrestling A. 1pt armour. Treasures: Cheeses, Sheep and Goats, perhaps an item from Poseidon.

Cyclopes (Swordbearer) Mass 38 Strength 36 Agility 6 Intelligence 7, One vitriolic, one melancholic humour in brain. Some water elemental magic nodes among their number.

Scene Three: Keeper of the Winds

Departing the cyclopes, the next place of call is the floating Aeolian island, inhabited by Aeolus, son of Hippotas, his wife, and his six sons and six daughters (who have married each other). Their island is surrounded by a wall bound by iron. The place would be well-fortified against any aggression, but with the presence of Odysseus among the crew the party may enter this place. Here they will be entertained and be treated with luxury. All Aeolus asks is storytelling about the campaign in Troy and the journey thus far. It is a good opportunity for a PC to make use of their Diplomacy (Swordbearer) or Poetry & Storytelling (Heroes) skills.

At the end of a month, for Aeolus pumps questions from all and sundry and in every detail, he finally bids Odysseus well and sets him on his journey. The fine sailing that occurs after (easy tests if desired) this is indeed pleasant. Odysseus has been given a bag bound with a silver cord by Aeolus, and some crewmembers have become jealous of how closely he guards it, for his will not say what is contained within. It is clear that there is some great treasure within which the captain is not sharing. The PCs should certainly be involved in this debate and will face a challenge of deciding whether to tell their captain - and thus lose any future respect, assistance etc from the crew - or whether they

should simply argue for or against taking the bag.

For narrative reasons, the bag is opened. Traditionally it was after ten days with Icarus just coming within view. When this happens the winds contained within are released, whereupon a great storm is released that blows the fleet back to the Aeolian island. Here, when the story is recounted, Aeolus and his family offers no assistance (regardless of Diplomacy or Poetry & Storytelling checks) and describes Odysseus and his crew as "vilest of mankind... abhorred by heaven" and sends the fleet on its way.

Note that if the PCs get in their head to fight Aeolus, they will discover he has incredible mastery of the winds that will simply blow them away, with the equivalent of Strength 40 (Swordbearer) or Strength 110 (Heroes). If somehow they are protected by that, Zeus will send lightning bolts from the heavens to protect his favoured keeper of the winds.

Scene Four: Land of the Laestrygonians

Following the second departure from the Aeolian island there is no wind at all; the fleet must make what time they can by rowing and spend six days and nights by such method. On the seventh day they reach a rocky land with a small harbour (seamanship checks required) leads to the town of Telepylus, the city of the Laestrygonians. A group is set out to scout the lands which, of course, includes the PCs. First they spy a shepherd driving a flock of sheep and goats and then a young woman, a daughter of Antiphates. When they visit their home, they discover it is inhabited by ogres who set about and attack Odysseus' crew. When (not if) the PCs retreat back to the ship hue-and-cry has been called and "thousands" of Laestrygonians are now giving chase. It is necessary now to row out of the harbour as rocks and spears are thrown at the departing vessels.

"They threw vast rocks at us from the cliffs as though they had been mere stones, and I heard the horrid sound of the ships crunching up against one another, and the death cries of my men, as the Laestrygonians speared them like fishes and took them home to eat them."

Ogres (Heroes): Strength 30, Endurance 40, Throw Rock A, Spear A, Club A.

Ogres (Swordbearer): Strength 15 Mass 18, Agility 8, Intelligence 7. Random 2 spirit nodes in stomach.

Scene Five: The Pigs of Circe

After the encounter with the Laestrygonians, Odysseus's fleet is now manned by a mere forty-four men, about half of what he set out with. Sailing and rowing is particularly hard, and through wind and current the fleet finds itself at an island. For some time the party languishes on the shore out of sheer exhaustion and Odysseus searches the land, discovering that it is certainly an island. From a vantage point on top of a hill he notices a stream of smoke from deep within the forest. Returning to the beach, he sends half his men out to find the source of the smoke, an expedition led by Eurylochus, which will include the PCs.

The reconnaissance group will find a house of cut stone in the middle of the forest. It will be surrounded by wolves and lions patrolling all about it, but rather than display aggression the animals will wag their tails, fawn upon them, rub their noses against the party and so forth. From within the house they can hear singing and the sounds of a loom at work. When called, a beautiful raven-haired woman with four servants welcomes the party and invites them inside where she provides them a meal of cheese, honey, grain and wine. At this stage a very hard test should be made against Drinking (Swordbearer) or Endurance *1 (Heroes); if failed the characters will fall drunk, whereupon Circe will cast a transformation spell, which drunken characters will automatically fail, and they will be transformed into pigs.

Eurylochus, and perhaps some of the PCs, did not enter Circe's abode and thus can make their way back to the beach and inform Odysseus what has happened. Odysseus takes it upon himself (and any PC volunteers) to rescue their crewmembers from the witch. On the way they will encounter Hermes in the form of a young man, who tells them they cannot defeat Circe with force of arms. Instead, he recommends, they take some of the herb that he has brought which

will protect them against the drugs that she puts in the food and drink. The herb itself has a black root and a white flower; it is known as Moly; "and mortal men cannot uproot it, but the gods can do whatever they like."

Circe will engage in the same actions as before, but when it is clear that she cannot bewitch the characters present she will plead for mercy, claiming that all she wanted to do was provide happiness for the crewmembers (and indeed, they are as happy as pig can be). She offers her affections to any who care as a token of her friendship. But unless a solemn oath is sworn that she will bring them no harm she will use this opportunity to "unman" the characters (or "unwoman" as appropriate), for such activities with a goddess like her is dangerous for mortals. The four servants, who are nymphs, will also attend to the needs of the party.

Assuming that they have achieved such assent however, Circe will eventually return the crew to the non-porcine state and invite them to stay as long as they desire. According to the story they stayed in the company of Circe and her housemaids for a year; the place is so good it is possible that they may never leave. Note that during this time one character, the youngest of the crew, Elpenor, will in a drunken state fall from the roof of Circe's house and kills himself. When the party does decide to leave, Circe remarks "You must go to the house of Hades and of dread Proserpine to consult the ghost of the blind Theban prophet Teiresias, whose reason is still unshaken. To him alone has Proserpine left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly." No guide will be required, for the North Wind will take the boat to the required place and then enter the underworld. An offering of milk, wine and water is required as an offering to the dead. Naturally enough, Odysseus's crew will complain bitterly of this proposal, for none wish to visit the land of the dead.

For Heroes of Olympus, Circe is probably the greatest witch that has ever lived, short of Hermes and Hecate. She is capable of casting any spell from the list of Hecate and Hermes. In terms of Swordbearer she has sufficient elemental and spirit nodes to cast any listed spell. Apart from that however, she has the appearance and capabilities of a normal person, albeit with excellent skills in cooking, singing, weaving and sensual arts.

Scene Six: Hades

Circe sens a good wind to aid Oysseus as the fleet sails to the western edge of the world. Reaching a harbour, a sacrifice is made to the dead first of honey and milk, then with wine, White barley is sprinked on the whole, before two sheep are sacrificed. After this ghosts come out from Erebus, the lower half of Hades, the underworld. This is where the dead must pass immediately after dying before Charon ferries the souls of the dead across the river Styx, upon which they entered the land of the dead. Elpenor is the first ghost to make himself known, and he pleads for the others to return to Circe's home give him a proper cremation or burial. Odysseus then encounters the ghost of his dead moth, Anticlea, who informs him that he is thought of dead and the many suitors to Penelope. The PCs themselves will also encounter ghosts of relatives and friends who have died in their absence, and give dire warnings of the situation at home.

This is confirmed by the ghost of the adrogynous Theban Teiresias who gives prophecy that Odysseus' fleet will be challenged by Poseidon for blinding his son, the Cyclopes Polyphemus. Teiresias also says the Odysseus will return home alone; a statement that will should cause some fear among those present! After putting the suitors to his wife to the sword, Odysseus must find a new home and establish a new land far from the sea and make sacrifices to Poseidon. Other famous spirits will also come forth to see the unusual spectacle of the living in the land of dead. This includes Agammenon, who has been murdered, Achilles, Ajax, who is still angry with Odysseus for taking his prize during life - the armour of Achilles. ""When I saw him I tried to pacify him and said, 'Ajax, will you not forget and forgive even in death, but must the judgement about that hateful armour still rankle with you?"

After this there are visions of those punished in Hades, "Tityus son of Gaia stretched upon the plain and covering some nine acres of ground. Two vultures on either side of him were digging their beaks into his liver... Tantalus, who stood in a lake that reached his chin; he was dying to quench his thirst, but could never reach the water, for whenever the poor creature stooped to drink, it dried up and vanished, so that there was

nothing but dry ground... Sisyphus at his endless task raising his prodigious stone with both his hands. With hands and feet he tried to roll it up to the top of the hill, but always, just before he could roll it over on to the other side, its weight would be too much for him, and the pitiless stone would come thundering down again on to the plain."

Scene Seven: The Call of the Siren

The next scene involves the fleet passing the island of the Sirens, a half-bird half-woman creature. From Circe's description they are believed to be drowners of men, ("There is a great heap of dead men's bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them") but with an irresistible song. Odysseus, wanting to hear their song, has his sailors plug their ears with beeswax and tie him to the mast. When he hears their song, he ordered the sailors to untie him but they cannot hear him. Eventually when the isle is passed he is released.

It is possible here that PCs, being the sort of character that they inevitably are with either (a) not plug their ears or (b) decide to free Odysseus. If either is the case the Sirens have an equivalent magic power of Mesmerise (Heroes) or Charm (Swordbearer) with the effect that the characters will make their way directly to the Siren and will happily drown in their attempt to reach them in the rocky and rough seas that surround their home (-50% chance to Swimming checks). If by some great fortune that the characters reach the Sirens it is possible that they may come into conflict with them if the spell is broken; in which case they are treated as normal humans. A thorough search of the area will reveal a multitude of normal and perhaps even some minor magic items among the bones of the dead.

Any who hear the Siren's song gain a divine insight into music and singing. This is a immediate +30% bonus to such skills (Singing & Harping in Heroes, Musician in Swordbearer).

Scene Eight: The Straits of Scylla and Charybdis

Immediately beyond the Isle of the Sirens (it's a rather tough part of the world), Odysseus must pass through the dangerous strait that is inhabited by Scylla on one side and Charybdis on the other. Scylla has six monstrous heads perched on long necks along with twelve feet, whereas Charybdis had a single gaping mouth that sucked in huge quantities of water and belches, creating whirlpools.

On Circe's advice, Odysseus chooses the Scylla route at maximum speed for that can lead to minimum casualties. "For Scylla is not mortal; moreover she is savage, extreme, rude, cruel and invincible. There is no help for it; your best chance will be to get by her as fast as ever you can, for if you dawdle about her rock while you are putting on your armour, she may catch you with a second cast of her six heads, and snap up another half dozen of your men; so drive your ship past her at full speed, and roar out lustily to Crataeis who is Scylla's dam, bad luck to her; she will then stop her from making a second raid upon you."

PCs, especially those in control of their own ships, may have different ideas. Adopting Odysseus' plan requires each PC to roll a single d6; if they roll a 1, that means Scylla has taken them in her jaws, whereupon they will be consumed. The GM should mention the odds beforehand, as the characters would be able to engage in this fairly simple calculation of their chances.

Stopping the boat to fight Scylla means that each round she will be able to consume six individuals with the same odds as expressed above. She is extremely difficult to defeat. In Heroes of Olympus she is the equivalent of a Hydra (but without the poison or immortal head). In Swordbearer she is the equivalent of a Dragon, but with six heads (hit location 1-3 head (random 1d6), 4 forelegs, 5-7 body, 8 belly, 9 hindlegs, 10 tail).

Bypassing Charybdis requires a very hard Seamanship test (-50%) and if this is failed an even harder Swimming test (-70%) to escape the whirlpool. Circe's advice, as grim as it is, is certainly the most sensible option.

Scene Nine: The Isle of the Sun God

After the experiences of the Sirens and the Sea Monsters, Odysseus' fleet reaches Thrinacia Island. Circe and Teiresias both have warned Odysseus not to land there, for the cattle and sheep belong to the Sun God Helios and are tended by his daughters, the goddesses Phaethusa and Lampetie. The crew, lead by Eurylochus are exhausted and saddened by the recent experience. They argue bitterly with Odysseus to let them take harbour and rest upon the shore. PCs can argue one way or another. A particularly exceptional argument may even convince the crew to continue on, otherwise Odysseus - realising that he cannot row the fleet on his own - submits to the desires of the majority, but pleads with the crew not to harm any of the cattle and sheep.

For an entire month bad winds blow continuously and the crew are unable to leave the island. With their supplies exhausted, crewmembers - urged by Eurylochus - slaughter and eat some of Helios's cattle. PCs may have the opportunity (depending on previous actions, cf., Scene 3 for example) to overhear and prevent the action. Or they might decide simply that eating is better than starvation; to give a sense of impending doom, have the foodstuffs reach 50% supply within the first week, and have the party on half-rations in the second and third week. By the fourth week they should start losing characteristics (Endurance and Strength in Heroes, Mass and Strength in Swordbearer) and by the end of the week they should be sufficiently mad with hunger.

"For a whole month the wind blew steadily from the South, and there was no other wind, but only South and East. As long as corn and wine held out the men did not touch the cattle when they were hungry; when, however, they had eaten all there was in the ship, they were forced to go further afield, with hook and line, catching birds, and taking whatever they could lay their hands on; for they were starving."

Disturbingly, the cattle proved their divine origins after slaughter: "And indeed the gods began at once to show signs and wonders among us, for the hides of the cattle crawled about, and the joints upon the spits began to low like cows, and the meat, whether cooked or raw, kept on making a noise just as cows do."

When the fleet sails away from the island, Helios successfully pleads to Zeus to send a thunderbolt at the ships, which occurs on the seventh day with an incredible storm. This is an attack directed by Zeus himself against the ships and their crew; in all probability everyone will be killed, either from the lightning bolts from the sky, ships breaking apart ("the mast fell upon the head of the helmsman in the ship's stern, so that the bones of his head were crushed to pieces"), or drowning. It is possible through some other divine intervention that a character could be saved (although a God would be loathe to directly go against Zeus' will) or, even more miraculously, that a character could plead to Zeus for mercy. If a GM drags out the situation it is possible that players can deal with their tragedy with appropriate desperation.

Scene Ten: Calypso

Any characters that survive, including Odysseus, find themselves washed ashore on the island of Ogygia which is inhabited by nymph Calypso, the daughter of Titan, and her maids. Enarmoured by the heroes who have survived the wrath of Zeus himself and desparately lonely, Calypso treats the surviving crew members with great kindness and affection. She wishes those present to stay forever, and promises immortality and eternal youth (for she has both). Odysseus however is more interested in returning home, despite the charms of the nymph. According to the story, Odysseus does not leave for seven years and that only occurs after Athena asks Zeus to give him the opportunity to depart; heart-broken, Calypso helps Odysseus and any others build a raft to escape the island, and then attempts suicide but cannot due to her immortality.

Even with the raft however, the ever vindictive Poseidon sends another storm his way, after some twenty days at sea on the raft. This requires three Seamanship checks and, if those are failed, Swimming checks. If both are failed the character will drown. If either are successful the character will reach the land of the Phaeacians, near-death if the raft is

lost, in relatively better question if it is retained.

Scene Eleven: The Phaeacians

With the remaining characters washed ashore and semi-conscious, Athena has instructed the princess Nausikaa, the daughter of King Alkinoös, to go to the seashore to wash her clothes (of all things!). Whoever remains is awakened by the sounds of the princess and her maids playing on the beach, which terrifies the maids to see these naked unkempt individuals - unless of course Diplomacy or Poetry checks are successful. Nausikaa, encouraged by Athena, stays to converse with the group. Clothes, food and drink are provided by the princess along with directions to the palace of King Alkinoös.

Athena, disguised as a young girl, advises the group how to enter the palace, which is guarded by mechanical dogs made of silver and gold, constructed by Hephaestus, and surrounded by walls of bronze and gates of gold. Inside the palace has a lighting system consisting of golden statues of young men with lighted torches in their hands. Athena, providing Odysseus, a cloaking cloud provided by Athena, can by-pass the protection systems of the palace and enters the chamber of King Alkinoös, where - despite some surprise - they are offered the hospitality and the opportunity to discuss their journey thus far. Depending on how successful the story-telling is, the Phaeacians may indeed decide to assist the remaining group with one of their thought-controlled galleys - but only after an offer of the King's daughter in marriage is made, a feast is held, and games of poetry, singing, lyre, wrestling, boxing, discus etc, are held. It is quite plausible that the PCs will want to engage in these competitions.

The boat provided by the Phaeacians is truly remarkable:

"The ship bounded forward on her way as a four in hand chariot flies over the course when the horses feel the whip. Her prow curvetted as it were the neck of a stallion, and a great wave of dark blue water seethed in her wake. She held steadily on her course, and even a falcon, swiftest of all birds, could not have kept pace with her. Thus, then, she cut her way through the water, carrying one who was as cunning as the gods, but who was now sleeping peacefully, forgetful of all that he had suffered both on the field of battle and by the waves of the weary sea."

Scene Twelve: Return to Ithaca

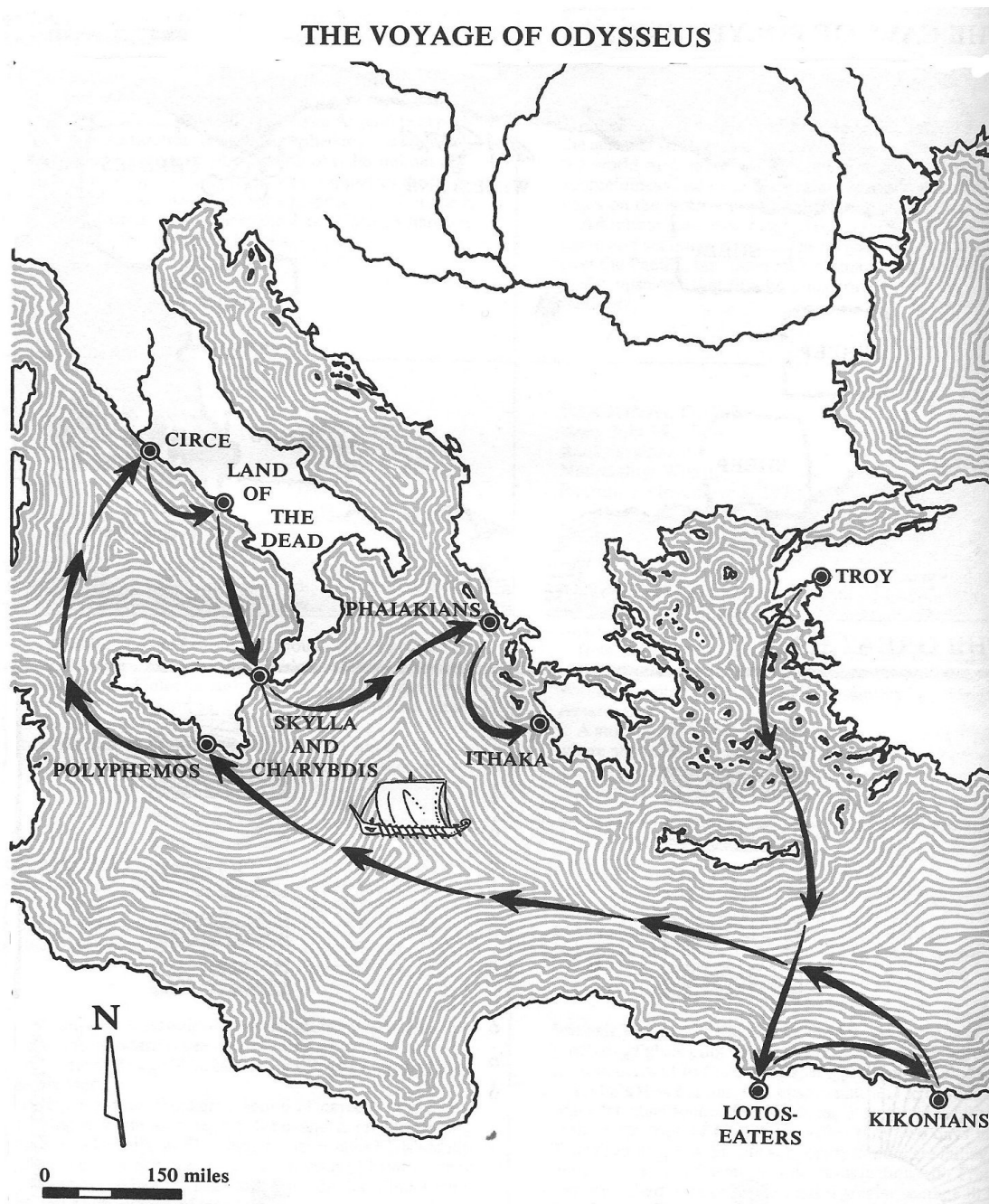
The party, or what remains of it, returns to Ithaca. Taking up a disguise, they meet Telemachus, Odysseus' son, who gives them hospitality but does not recognise his own father. The group then visits the home of Eumaeus the swineherd, an old friend of Odysseus. There the party can reveal itself and determine how to deal with the five score suitors to Penelope's hand, who have spent the years at Odysseus' house, eating his food and generally being a nuisance.

Upon arrival at his home, Penelope has announced to the assembled suitors that whoever can string Odysseus' old bow and shoot an arrow through the sockets of twelve axes standing in a row can have her hand; none of the suitors are successful - that is a lot of arrows! Some particularly cheeky PCs may make such an attempt, although this will require a Diplomacy or Poetry & Storytelling check to justify their claim followed by a very hard archery check (-50%). Note that any who attempt the check will be counted as one of the suitors by Odysseus and subject to his inevitable wrath.

Assuming that none of the PCs engage in an attempt, Odysseus will have an attempt whilst Telemachus' argues the case that he be allowed to do so. The shot is successful, and battle results - those who fight with Odysseus have an extra 6 (Swordbearer) or 2 (Heroes) points of armour and additional +50 to their weapon skill, due to the intervention of Athena on their side. The battle must continue until all one hundred and eight of Penelope's suitors are killed. The suitors have no special combat abilities; they are Class A Warriors (Heroes) or average humans (Swordbearer).

Penelope initially does not believe that her husband has really returned and tests him by ordering her servant change the bed in their wedding-chamber. Odysseus protests that this cannot be done since he made the bed himself and knows that one of its legs is a living olive tree. At that point Penelope accepts that it really is Odysseus.

THE VOYAGE OF ODYSSEUS



GURPS Krononauts: Transhumanism and Time Travel

by Karl Brown

with assistance from Michael Brown and Lev Lafayette

GURPS Krononauts is a story set in the near future (2092) with time-travellers who attempt to retain the timeline of the past against Revisionists. There is some reference to the TimeMaster game by Pacesetter, especially their use of Significance Ratings and Time Riders by Iron Crown Enterprises, but the primary books used are GURPS Basic Set (third edition revised and fourth edition), GURPS Transhuman Space, GURPS Cyberpunk, GURPS Space, GURPS Uplift, GURPS Ultratech, GURPS Psionics, GURPS Biotech, GURPS Vehicles and, of course, GURPS Time Travel.

The protagonists are a small, isolated group with a fully operating Artificial Intelligence (Archangel, named after the isolated Russian city where the PCs are based). The antagonists are a corporation (Meyer Stuttgart GMBH) who has developed time-travel technology to enrich themselves with little consideration of the problems that arise from their activity. The Artificial Intelligence was originally developed for the corporation but the original programmer realised the nefarious desires of the company, took the AI, left a 'crippled' version and escaped; this character is a fanatic in protecting "true time".

In terms of character style, the PCs are in a similar situation to "Blake's Seven", a small group of rebels with a powerful technology, but socially isolated. Archangel is the only fully sapient artificial intelligence. Use of semi-intelligent machines ("lizard AI") are used for industrial and domestic use (e.g., cleaning). In general the game uses TL 9 with selected TL 10 technologies, especially in the transhumanist area; there are a small number of uplifted animals, including some primates, crows, pigs, dolphins, and dogs. Some technologies have been developed specifically for such creatures (e.g., the Saab Raven Airbike). In other 'superscience' areas (e.g., reactionless drives, FTL drives etc), the game still uses TL 8. In general TL 8 is fully achieved by the 2030s and TL 9 is reached in the 2050s.

Translator

This is a TL9 dedicated minicomputer computer running a TL9 translation program which gives a skill of 14 (UT33, V62), or +2 if aiding an existing skill over 13. \$13000, 40Lb, 0.4cf, Complexity 4. Often a Datalink program is added allowing the machine to be linked to a CommPhone and from there to other CommPhones.

Translator Service

Most phone service providers can add on a computerised translator service for a nominal fee (about \$2 a month). Characters of Struggling or better wealth usually include this service as part of their cost of living. A typical service provides a skill of 12. Higher skill levels are available (up to 15 at TL9) each +1 doubles the cost per month. These services are available after 2033.

Several new human types were created by powerful organisations for some significant economic or tactical advantage. All of these are sub-species able to breed with normal humans. Genetic engineering of the human species is also be used for minimal tailor-made changes, rather the breeding of specific races. Since these changes do not produce a coherent population and only add or subtract from the normal human range of abilities these do not require templates, they are covered by the 150pt (rather than 100pt) allocated for character generation. In practice there is even greater diversity than this because of the use of biomods and cyberware. All humans share some common traits they all are sexually active year round and they all fall in love. Of the other sentients only ravens fall in love and only dolphins rival humans in active sexuality. Most humans are accepting of the variety within the species but tensions between extremists still occasionally flare in the 2090s.

A small number of animal species have been uplifted however only a few could travel through most historical eras without raising eyebrows. Current technology cannot create the humanoid 'furries' imagined by 1990's Japanese pop-

culture. Despite the non-humanoid forms a society has been prepared for this diversity of body shapes by previous catering for the disabled and extremely elderly. At TL9 science is unable to engineer out the presentient status of the rat mind. However, rats and mice are the model animals where much early development is done before the financial cost and ethical hurdles of keeping larger animals for experimentation. Similarly to the rodents the dog uplift program was a stepping stone to programs in species capable of full uplift of an entire species. A single new breed of large dog with improved mental capability was produced. Dogs are close to human children in mental capability and enjoy minor citizenship. 'Genius' dogs, smarter than most, can apply for full citizenship in some nations. Due to their unusual sleep patterns, natural cetaceans have access to the psionic abilities of Astral Projection and Telepathy for purposes of contacting their own species in dream-state.

Raven Species Template -28pt

This template assumes that the Fantasy Bestiary is out of date and wild-type Ravens are IQ6 as indicated by research into corvids. Large parrots are also IQ6. This template is also based on the known abilities of ravens. The enhancements made are +1IQ and remove Poor Grip.

Attributes IQ -3 (-20) ST -7 (-60) HT +4 (+45) DX +1 (+10) Subtotal -25

Advantages Acute Hearing +2 (4) Acute Vision +2 (4), Alertness +3 (15), Animal Empathy (5), Beak as Sharp Teeth reach C (5), Cast Iron Stomach (15), Decreased Life Support (10) Early Maturation 3 (15), Empathy (15), Enhanced Move +20% (2) Feather as light fur (0), Mimicry (15), Penetrating Call (5), Peripheral Vision (15), Sharp Claws (4), Ultrahearing (5), Winged Flight cannot hover (24). Subtotal 158

Disadvantages Cannot Swim (0), Chauvinistic (-1), Chummy* (-5), Edgy (-5), Fragile (-20), Inconvenient Size (-15), No Smell/Taste (-5), Odious Personal Habit eats carrion (-10), Reduced Hit Points -9 (-45), Restricted Manipulators (BE118, -15), Reduced Move 1 land (-5), Social Stigma* outsider (-15), Sleepy 50% (-10), Short Lifespan x1 (-10). Subtotal -161

Skills Fluent in one human language and in Raven (3)

Common Options Most ravens have at least one of the following: Sense of Duty to Spouse, Ally Spouse, Allied Group Murder, Greed, Cowardice, Careful, Kleptomania, or Curious, low wealth and social status, survival skill.

Ravens look much like their wild type counterparts large (averaging 7 pounds) black corvids with white eyes. An ornithologist would be able to identify one by the alterations that make the feet useful hands and a slightly enlarge cranium

As social, tool-using, problem solving animals that were cheaper to keep than apes or cetaceans, corvids became the model animal for study of the biology of cognition during the 2020s. This research eventually led to the birds acting as test beds for uplift experiments before proceeding to cetaceans and apes. However, because of the larger number of researchers able to afford birds to work on, ravens were actually uplifted before the larger animals. During this period Australia led the world in uplift research and it was the Australian Raven, a more social bird than its European counterpart that makes up the bulk of an uplifted raven's genetic material.

Ravens are social birds they dwell in flocks and are devoted spouses who mate for life. Raven groups show some cooperation but little coordination or leadership, very unlike the situation with humans and other primates. One common feature of raven groups is for more daring and popular individuals to stay out at the physical edge of the group calling news of danger and opportunities to the others. Since the calls of the birds travel a long way raven groups instinctively spread out. Modern ravens will spread out over a mile radius to have a conversation. For a raven 'alone' means out of earshot of other intelligent ravens.

Ravens have a non-psi form of Empathy because of an evolutionary history of judging the mood of predators at carcasses. This same heritage may explain why the birds are wary of humans and why human company does little to ease a raven's loneliness. Some intellectually adopt a more liberal ideology regarding who is a person but beneath this they instinctively see humans as predators, not people. Similarly, ravens have no qualms about feeding on carrion regardless of what or who the corpse was in life, but most have learned to reign in their appetite to avoid offending.

Academics have noticed two worrying trends emerging. Ecologists have noted that in the thirty years since emancipation the uplifted raven population is exploding, displacing wild corvids, some of the most successful species on the planet may soon be threatened. Sociologists have noted that while human urban minorities tend to slowly merge with the mainstream making both cultures richer, raven culture seems to be slowly drifting away from human society. As the birds build up their economic base they seem destined to become a separate civilisation running parallel to that of humanity and her partners. Unlike canines there is little work for ravens within human culture and only the smartest ravens are capable of most of it. As a result many work in service industries catering for other ravens and some 'go wilder' and live as pre-uplift birds did. The truth is most raven love the comforts of civilisation but, unlike humans, ravens can opt out and survive. They still use their own calls, which have evolved into a true language, in addition to human languages. These calls, used with penetrating cry, allow ravens to communicate over several miles. Having a language of their own is thought to be a key factor in the cultural drift away from the rest of society.

The core time travel technology is a 'Projector' method; tight-beam Quantum Tunnelling that allows imperfect and limited transportation of matter into the past for a short period of time. PCs can typically leave and come back with personal possessions only. There is weak psychic powers (like the Psychic Staring Effect, Nina Kulagina), which are

used - like Norman Spinrad's "Riding the Torch" - for the initial time-travel "jump", a side-effect from drug research into pre-adolescent memory and cognitive development. Such "psi kids" often have dissociation identity disorder as a result. 'Jumping' to the distant past is easier for Archangel and for the jumper than the close past. There is extreme nausea involved in jumping close to the current time; about one fifty years prior is the minimum without threatening one's health. Observer effect applies; with sickness plus agreement on resolving paradoxes. The observer effect applies and the past is plastic with medium resistance; a temporal snarl occurs if you 'meet yourself'.

Body Language (Detect Lies) (Mental Hard) Defaults to Psychology-3

This skill is altered. It now includes all of the Detect Lies skill and the combat capabilities of body language have been removed. The altered text is given below:

This is the learned equivalent of Empathy. As with Empathy it can be used to spot imposters, psi possession etc and determine the loyalties of NPCs. By observation you can determine the mood or attitude of an individual or the social structure of a group. You could for instance notice that a leader is nervous during a speech or spot the power behind the throne. Those with the Empathy Advantage find their natural intuition adds to this skill. Body language can be used for all the same uses as Empathy This also includes the ability to tell when someone is lying to you. It is not the same as Interrogation; this skill works in casual or social situations. When you ask to use this skill the GM rolls a Quick Contest of Skill between your Body Language and your subjects IQ (or Fast talk or Acting skill). If you win, the GM will tell you whether you are being lied to. If you lose, the GM may lie to you about whether you are being lied to . or just say "you can't tell."

Modifiers: the usual +4 if you have the Empathy advantage. If the liar is of a different species, the GM may assess a penalty (usually -2) unless the questioner is very familiar with that species!

A colony has been established on the moon and Mars, along with a tethered asteroid base (cf., Beantalk from Traveller 2300) with exploratory mining endeavours in the asteroid belt. There are two major space stations L1 (Crystal Palace, ESA) and L5 O'Neill One (NASA) - both of these adopted from R. Talsorian's *Cyberpunk* and a lunar base a Tycho (c.f., Arthur C. Clarke's 2061). Terraforming has begun on Mars, but completion is some time away. An interstellar probe to Alpha Centauri has been launched. Politically, multi-party elections are now the norm in China following the first elections in 2018. Massive overpopulation and food shortages became a problem around 2020 to 2030 until technological developments allowed extremely high-intensity agriculture and became a problem, again in 2050 . Global warming reaches a 2°C increase by 2091.

There are competing trends towards federalism and nationalism. Australia and New Zealand combine into a single country called Austronesia and in 2051 the EU became a single federal country, the United States of Europe, and a year later Indonesia and Malaysia united as a single state, as does the central american republics into the United Central American States. In 2059 Tibet becomes independent, as does Texas and southern California after a protracted US-Mexico war in the 2030s.

The United States of America lurches between libertarianism and conservatism. International relations have been transformed this century. The USA, Japan, Australasia, and a liberalised China form the Pacific Alliance. The UN has not emerged as a world government. The UN does impose many restrictions on Nations in the arenas of human rights, trading and war crimes. There are UN space and naval forces but these are pitifully small, designed to transport troops and provide logistics. Of note though is the ICC Commandos, elite forces sent to bring major war criminals to justice. The UN has also absorbed Interpol, as well as facilitating cooperation between national police forces these police have jurisdiction in international waters, Antarctica, and space. Antarctica is also controlled by UNESCO.

'Islamicism' becomes a failed ideology with highly disruptive religious reformation occurring in the Arab world. A Palestinian Confederation of contemporary Israel, Palestine and Jordan is established by a radical Rabbi, David Ben Levi, an ultra-orthodox Jew who also was a social secularist ending the "Palestine Question". In 2075 there was a brief military conflict between Russia, Canada and a US alliance allied with Canada. The Canadian province of Nunavut has seceded and joined an independent Greenland; there are also pressures in the Canadian NW Territories and Alaska.

GURPS Languages

by Michael Cole

Languages in Gurps

Language skills in GURPS fail reality checks, mainly because language use does not fit the skill system. There are two major uses of language; to communicate, and an artistic medium or a tool to do something else. Communication lacks a clear success/failure dichotomy - many tasks are either automatic or impossible. It works better as an advantage than a skill, and is covered below under Fluency. Using language as a tool often has clearly defined successes and failures, but the skill involved is rarely language competence. These activities are best covered by separate skills, discussed under Task Skills below.

Fluency

Fluency measures your ability to communicate in a language. Each language is a separate variable cost advantage, but learned and recorded like a skill and given a numerical value for ease of comparison. No rolls are made for normal communication. Occasionally conditions may merit a sense roll (to hear someone over a loud background for example) or an IQ check (to understand critical instructions issued only once), and it is possible to contrive situations where a contest of fluency might be reasonable (to see who can rephrase a sentence in the most obscure way without changing the basic meaning), but generally anything within the competence of the least skilled participant gets through.

- 1) **Recognition - Language 6 (0.5 pt).** Equivalent to a 0+ score on the Foreign Service Institute proficiency scale. You recognize the language when you hear it, understand important commands, know a few useful phrases, and can follow simple replies.
- 2) **Broken - Language 7 (1 pt).** FSI 1. You could survive in the language. If your listeners are patient, and speak slowly and simply, you can understand and answer basic questions.
- 3) **Accented - Language 8 (2 pt).** FSI 2. You can use the language for everyday purposes. You understand clear conversation with only an occasional need to ask for a definition. Your speech is hesitant and heavily accented with poor grammar.
- 4) **Non-Native - Language 10 (3 pt).** FSI 3. Practical fluency. You have no trouble understanding clear conversation, and can follow technical material with effort, assuming you could follow it in your native language. Your accent is obvious with some minor grammatical errors. Poetry, slang or other nonstandard use can still give you trouble.
- 5) **Native - Language 12 (4 pt).** FSI 4+. In casual speech you have a slight accent, and make an occasional mistake. You understand poetry, literature and other artistic uses of the language, and can follow current slang, colloquialisms and cultural references.
- 6) **Professional - Language 14 (5 pt).** FSI 5. You have a second native language. You automatically think in the language when using it regularly, can use it to do mental arithmetic and regularly dream in it.

Dialects, Accents and Native Speech

Normal characters get one native language at 14 at no cost (see the Dysphasia disadvantage for exceptions). Children raised in a multilingual environment can acquire several native languages simultaneously, but still pay for the extra ones - consider it an Unusual Background cost. Since bilinguals often learn further languages easily, a level of Language Talent is realistic and may lower the total cost.

A dialect is a particular way of speaking a language, a set of minor variations that distinguishes the speech of certain regions, age cadres, social classes, educational levels, or even sexes. Everyone speaks in some dialect. To identify the origin of an accent or dialect roll against Linguistics, Voices or Grammar [language]. The dialect you normally use must be specified when buying the language.

Learning Languages

Languages are purchased much like mental skills. Like mental skills, they take twice as long to learn without a teacher, four times as long if you are learning without any feedback at all (say from a text). Some things that do *not* affect learning include IQ, Eidetic Memory, and Linguistics skill.

Objectively, all languages are about equally difficult. Other than languages that actually have defaults, most of difference appears in the early stages of learning a language with major features not found in your native language. If the GM wishes, he can require twice as much study to pick up the first point in such languages. One of the best ways to learn a language is to depend on it. Immersion in a native speech community and using the language for your daily needs counts as 0.5 points of study per month up to fluency 10.

Defaults

Knowledge of one language may allow some understanding of related languages. Only languages that are closely related have defaults; dialects default to each other at -0 to -4; distinct languages of the same family default at -4 to -10. Pure defaults only allow understanding; to reply, you must speak the language you know, and hope the listeners can understand using their defaults. You can buy up a language from your default skill; once you actually have points in the language your fluency does apply to tasks other than understanding.

Split language skills

In addition to defaults, several other situations can result in a difference between your ability to speak and understand a language. In such cases, record both, listing speaking ability before comprehension; for example English-8/12 indicates a thick accent and considerable difficulty speaking, but near native understanding of English. Typical situations resulting in split skills include; learning a language without audio input (a better speaker, or a lot of tapes), your speaking ability is limited to 8., you can sense but not produce a language (e.g. Mute), you may learn to understand it normally, but have a speaking skill of 0., you can produce but not properly sense a language (e.g., Deaf), you can learn to speak it at up to skill 8.

Special Languages Types

Liturgical Language -- a language learned for religious purposes. A little skill allows you to hold religious discussions! To use a language learned this way for daily survival requires skill 8 rather than 6.

Pidgins -- a simplified trade or contact language. Pidgins cannot be learned above skill 8; the more complex vocabulary does not exist! Many pidgins are based on one of the languages they bridge, but defaults are not guaranteed.

A **Creole** is a fully developed language that evolved when a pidgin acquired native speakers, there are no special rules. It may or may not default to one of the parents of the pidgin, but at least at first will default to the pidgin itself is at -0.

Non-lingual Languages

A language is not required to use sound (e.g., sign languages). A sign language is at least as fast a spoken language, and can convey ideas just as complex. It is no more possible to do 1:1 translation from ASL to English than from French to English. Do not confuse sign languages with finger spelling. Some sign languages use a finger spelling system for proper nouns, but it is not a major part of the language. Finger spellings are actually *literacies*, and are used to spell a *spoken* language.

Sign languages fall into of several categories; auxiliary languages, used when speech is unavailable, use the rules for pidgins (e.g., military codes such as the ninja Kuji-kuri), limited sign systems invented by deaf-mutes to communicate with their relatives, also using the pidgin rules., fully developed sign languages, primarily 'national' sign languages, which are treated like any language.

There are a few systems used by people who are both blind and deaf, which qualify as languages. Most resemble sign

languages, but the hand shapes are made in physical contact with the other participant. The best documented is the American system called Tadoma.

Whistled speech is usually found in cultures living in broken terrain, often among livestock herders. It can be clearly understood at much longer ranges than ordinary speech, 3 km in wooded areas, 10 km in narrow rocky valleys. Most whistled speech is produced by a simple change in articulation. The Whistled Speech advantage (4 points.) allows the character to speak any non-tonal language in whistled form and be understood by anyone else with this advantage.

Literacy

Treat literacy as a group of variable cost advantages, one per script. For most of history writing was limited to powerful elites. It began to spread downward in classical Greece, particularly in the cities, but is not really common until the advent of printing in the +15C. As late as +1850 there was open opposition to teaching the poor to read, on the grounds it made them insolent. If writing is common the GM may allow characters some level of literacy at no cost, in which case lacking it counts as a disadvantage equal to the cost to buy it up to the cultural norm, plus the value of any reaction modifier for being uneducated.

Iconography

Iconography, or pictographic writing, is art used to carry a message. Since anyone can try to interpret art, iconography is independent of language and literacy. History [Art] or Appreciate Beauty [culture] rolls may reveal meanings that escape observers unfamiliar with a culture's symbols.

Memory Aids

Devices used to remember details or keep accounts, such as tally sticks, trade tokens and knotted cords (kipu). They are not true writing, prior knowledge of what is recorded, or Bardic Lore skill if it is a traditional story, is required to read them.

Logographic Writing

In logographic writing each sign stands for a unit of meaning; the script is an independent language based on shapes rather than sounds. A pure logographic script is readable across languages boundaries because it *is* another language. The levels and costs of a logographic literacy are:

- logographic Script 4 (0.5 pts)** You recognize the script and a few of its more common signs, and can sometimes guess what a text is about.
- logographic Script 6 (1 pts)** You can puzzle out the meaning of a simple text, but many details will remain incomprehensible. You can usually identify the subject of complex texts you can't actually read, such as technical, legal or theological documents.
- logographic Script 8 (2 pts)** You can read simple text automatically, and can understand a complex text by rolling against IQ or a skill appropriate to the subject.
- logographic Script 10 (3 pts)** You can read any text at a normal speaking rates (about 180 words per minute), and understand complex material if you could follow it in your native language.
- logographic Script 12 (4 pts)** You can read most obscure signs, and can follow (and compose) literature and other language arts normally - which is harder than it sounds in a script with not closely related to speech.
- logographic Script 14 (5 pts)** You can read any form of the script, usually much faster than you could repeat it aloud.

Phonetic Writing

In phonetic scripts, each sign stands for a unit of sound. With only a small number of signs phonetic scripts are easy to learn, but a text can only be understood if the reader is literate in the script *and* fluent in the language recorded. Many phonetic literacies have the same names as languages, but it is important to distinguish them. For example Literacy (Greek) does not enable you to understand written Greek, only to read languages you do know which happen to be

written in Greek letters.

The levels and costs of a phonetic literacy are:

- **Phonetic Script 4 (0.25 pts)** You know the shapes and conventional order of the letters, can follow simple instructions, can sound out isolated words, and can write your name or other simple words or phrases you have practiced in advance.
- **Phonetic Script 6 (.5 pt)** You can read and understand simple connected text, albeit very slowly (under 30 wpm). Complicated sentences are beyond your ability to read and understand at the same time.
- **Phonetic Script 8 (1 pt)** You read slowly (under 120 wpm) and need to make an IQ roll to understand texts with a complex structure, such as technical specifications, legal documents, or poetry.
- **Phonetic Script 10 (2 pt)** You read as fast as you can speak (about 180 words per minute) and understand any written material you could follow if it were spoken aloud.
- **Phonetic Script 12 (3 pts)** You read silently, and faster than you can speak. Reading does not require any special effort, and can be carried on while performing some other light activity. This is the level of literacy taught by modern school systems.
- **Phonetic Script 14 (4 pt)** You read very quickly, and are familiar with many variant scripts and orthographies.

Alternative Reading Methods

Some scripts can be read in more than one fashion. Braille for example is intended to be read by touch, but is readable by sight. A second method of reading a script (Braille visually, carved Runes by touch, printed Roman by running a hyper-sensitive tongue over the page and tasting the edges of the ink) costs an extra character point. Alien scripts present more possibilities; changes in surface roughness used in a script readable by ultrasonic sonar might be read by touch, magnetic inks might be visible in some wavelengths and so on.

Language Traits: Advantages and Disadvantages

Communications Channel varies

A racial advantage allowing communications with other members of the race. The base cost is 10 points for a 2 yard range, 200 word per minute channel, modified by the effectiveness of the method.

Modifiers:

Touch only range	-20%
per 2 fold increase in range of range	+20%
per 10 fold decrease in speed	-25%
per 10 fold increase in speed	+25%
Severely limited topics (only emotions, only hunting coordination &c.)	-50%
Real time sharing of senses or thoughts	+100%
Can only communicate with one individual at a time	-50%
Private (immune to eavesdropping, or encrypted)	+100%
Undetectable (only participants know it is taking place)	+150%

This replaces several advantages such as Radio Speech, Subsonic Speech, Ultrasonic Speech and Secret Communications. Total up all the communications methods available to the race, and subtract 14 points to normalize for the human ones (voice/hearing at 64 yards and sign/vision at 8 yards).

Cultural Adaptability CI p23.

Includes the 5 pt Language Talent advantage rather than 2 levels of Language Talent.

Gift of Tongues +40

You can speak and understand any language you encounter at fluency 12. You do not automatically know what languages someone will understand though, if you

Speak first you still need to guess.

This is a super advantage, but also handy for modeling universal translators.

Special Enhancement: You can also read any language + 100%

Special Enhancement: You can automatically use any dialect or accent +25%

Special Limitation: Only for understanding -50%

Special Limitation: Only one race -0% to -20%

Special Limitation: Single Shot Fickle same costs as Fickle

You roll the first time you encounter a language to see if the Gift will work

on it and record the result. You never roll again. Note: unlike Fickle you

do *not* get one guaranteed success every 24 hours. This is handy for limited

but undefined database translators.

Language Talent +5/+15

You learn languages easily. The 5 point version adds 1 to the value of any points you spend learning a language, the 15-point version adds 2. This applies only to the language fluency and literacy, not to language task skills!

Semi-Literacy

Drop. Use Literacy 8 instead.

Voice +10

Your voice is particularly attractive. Voice gives you a +2 on any reaction roll made by someone who hears you speak, a permanent +2 to Singing skill and a +2 to performance or influence skills (Bard, Diplomacy, Performance, Politics, Rhetoric, Sex Appeal...) if you use them in speech.

Disadvantages

Bestial CI p101

Many language tasks are social skills, and consequently off limits if you have this disadvantage.

Cleft Lip

[Substitute Speech Impediment, often but not universally accompanied by below Average appearance.]

Deafness -20

You cannot hear. You can learn languages normally, but for any audible language your speaking skill is limited to 8, and your comprehension is restricted to written material and Lip Reading. Deafness is fairly common in older humans, and pre-lingual deafness occurs in 1 person in 1500.

[Drop bonuses/penalties to languages or sign languages. Drop the suggestion about earplugs. Confusing the players with the characters can be entertaining for a time, but in the long run is not a good idea]

Disturbing Voice

[CI p81 Use Speech Impediment instead]

Dyslexia -5/-10

If you have severe dyslexia you cannot buy any literacy, or do anything else requiring symbol manipulation - perform most computer tasks, cast standard spells or, learn skills like Mathematics or Heraldry, or even some forms of Appreciate Beauty. If total illiteracy is not the norm in your culture, you must take it as a disadvantage as well. Mild Dyslexia is fairly common and much less severe. You suffer a -4 on any task involving reading or symbol manipulation. This includes literacy and consequently imposes a maximum literacy of 10.

[Drop the learn at 1/4 speed without a teacher. Use the standard rules, but note that Illiterate characters (not just Dyslexic ones!) cannot learn from books, and most academic skills **can not** be learned without a teacher or text]

Dysphasia -15/-40

You have severe language difficulties. At the mild level, you do not have an automatic native language, are limited to fluency or literacy 8 in any language you do purchase, and can not attempt language task skills, as you are unable to understand how they work. You may not learn skills from texts, and may only learn from a teacher if the skill requires little linguistic interaction (GM's call, physical skills are usually OK, academic or magical ones are out of the question). At the severe level you have no grasp of language at all. You may not have any language or language task skills, or learn any skills from a teacher. The GM should forbid the player from saying anything except what his character is doing, and may overrule actions based on something someone else said. Dysphasia can result from brain damage, psychological trauma, or from lack of human social contact during childhood (the classic case is 'raised by wolves', but it has shown up in some very severe child abuse cases). Realistically, severe dysphasia can be bought down to mild, but not bought off after age 8. If dysphasia is acquired in play, the PCs language performance drops to 8 or 0, and he can't use his language task skills, but they are be recovered if the dysphasia is cured.

Hard of Hearing -2/level

You have trouble hearing. Each level of Hard of Hearing gives you a -1 on Hearing rolls. You may not take 10 or more levels, buy Deafness instead. You can learn and use audible languages normally, just at shorter conversation distances. Each -2 is functionally equivalent to halving the range at which you can hear something.

Mute -10/-15

You cannot use the standard communications method of the campaign. Usually this is voice, but if the major mode of communications is a sign language, being unable to speak is a quirk at best.

You may learn languages normally for understanding, and can use alternate communications channels like writing (if you are literate) or sign languages. The cost is -10 if you can usually still communicate; -15 if alternatives like writing or sign languages are rare, or you can't use them either. If the other characters do not share an alternate language with you, the GM may restrict your communications with them in time critical situations, or forbid it entirely if they also lack a common literacy.

[Drop the +3 to Gesture or Sign. Drop recommendations about leaving the room to discuss player actions unless this is done to ALL the players - a mute character's actions are no less obvious than anyone else's, and it unfairly allows the Mute player less chance to influence events. Note the reduced cost, compare Major Vow: Silence]

Non-Iconographic [CI p92]

Drop, use Dyslexia instead. As written this is a milder form of Dyslexia worth more points]

Presentient [CI p.103]

The language limitations are wrong! Spoken languages are just as valid as sign languages if you have the vocal apparatus and conversely sign languages are just as hard as spoken languages. Use:

Presentient -25

This is a racial disadvantage only. Presentients can not learn IQ based skills other than Easy ones, and even then not above IQ level. They have the -15 point version of Dysphasia and are unable to acquire phonetic literacies]

Speech Impediment -10

You have difficulty speaking clearly, or simply an unpleasant voice. You suffer a -2 reaction when conversation is called for, can not get certain jobs like translator or newscaster, and have a -2 to social and language task skills if you use them in speech. This disadvantage can represent a variety of problems - stuttering, cleft lip, vocal cord damage, an

artificial voice, or just a high squeaky rasping monotonous voice.

Stuttering

[Use Speech Impediment]

Task Skills

There are many skills which use language, but while fluency is necessary, it isn't the major factor. Such skills are acquired normally, but can only be used in languages known at fluency 8 or better. There is a -4 penalty for using a language known at fluency 8, a -2 penalty for fluency 10. If a skill is to produce a reaction from a target, he must also have fluency 8 or better in the language used. The penalties also apply to using the skills in writing. In phonetic scripts only fluency imposes penalties; in a logographic script, only literacy. In mixed scripts, or logographic scripts with enough of a phonetic character to impose a fluency limit both must be greater than 10 to avoid the penalties.

In addition to the skills listed below, this modifier applies to the Administration, Detect Lies, Directing, Enthrallment, Fnord, Fortune-telling, Hedgewise, Hypnotism, Intelligence Analysis, Law, Leadership, Merchant, Performance (of a spoken work), Politics (as an influence skill), Psychology, Research, Streetwise and Teaching skills.

Acting.

This skill is not affected by language fluency. It isn't necessary to speak English to play an Englishman, as long as the role does not require you to speak or understand unrehearsed English.

Bard (IQ/Ave) IQ-5

This is the skill used for general speaking, storytelling, oratory and sermonizing. It is also the skill used to tell jokes, think up puns and invent wordplay. A successful skill roll lets you influence, impress or entertain an audience. Charisma and Voice add to most uses of Bard.

Bardic Lore[type] (IQ/Hard) IQ-6

A collection of poems songs stories histories sagas and/or myths, memorized word for word. The prototypical [type] is the oral literature of a particular culture, but it can also be used for the repertoire of a musician or actor. A skill roll allows you to recite one word perfect, a failure indicates a flaw, omission or garbling. A separate Bard or Singing roll is needed to make the performance entertaining. The average listener is concerned with that second roll, and is unlikely to notice if you fail the Lore roll, but another bard is likely to care about accuracy over style.

Bardic Lore only measures how much material you have memorized. Other skills such as Poetry or Composition are required to compose new material, Literature is needed to critique it sensibly.

Calligraphy[script] (DX/Ave) DX-5 Artist-2 other Calligraphy-2

Prerequisite: Literacy

The art of decorative handwriting. Normally anyone literate in a script can scrawl something. Calligraphy is primarily an artistic skill, though it is required to write a pictographic script. You may specialize in a particular style (e.g. Court Hand, Carolingian Minuscule). Formal documents often require Calligraphy, and in many cultures a nicely laid out calligraphic document is more persuasive. Calligraphy takes about 30 minutes per page.

Composition (IQ/Ave) IQ-5 Rhetoric-3 Literature-5

The art of arranging language in a clear and entertaining manner. A success makes the intended points in an interesting way. A failure says most of what you wanted to get across, but the audience will have to work at it; generally they won't bother if it isn't important. A critical failure says something you did not mean, or convinces the audience you are an idiot. Substantial modifiers may apply for available time.

Composition alone is enough to produce works of fiction - stories, novels, dramatic scripts and so on. Composing exposition also requires knowledge of the subject (Physics to write popular science articles, History[military] to write

war games &c). If you have the subject skill at less than 12, you compose at -2. If you lack it entirely you can still compose at -2 if you can make a Research roll on the topic.

Persuasive writing uses Rhetoric. Telling the story aloud uses Bard

Debate

Use Rhetoric, or Logic for formal debates

Diplomacy (IQ/Hard) IQ-6

Diplomacy is the art of negotiation and of getting along with others. A skill roll can substitute for any non-combat reaction roll. Unlike other influence skills, a failed roll gives you a normal reaction roll, not an automatic Bad reaction. A successful roll will discover the true position of another negotiator, or hint at the best negotiating approach. Note some deals are too complex to negotiate with Diplomacy alone, Politics, Finance, Strategy or some other skill at 12+ is required to understand them well enough to negotiate them.

Enigmas (IQ/Hard) IQ-6

The study of riddles and word puzzles of all sorts, from Zen koans to crossword puzzles, anagrams to mystery novels. Simple logic puzzles may also be solved using Enigmas, but complicated mathematics or mathematical logic puzzles require Mathematics skill.

While contests of Enigmas are common in literature, Enigmas skill should not be allowed to short-circuit adventures. The solutions to individual enigmas may be *clues* to the overarching mystery in an adventure, but Enigmas only solves the small formal puzzles, not the entire mystery!

Fast Talk (IQ/Ave) IQ-5 Acting-5

The art of convincing your listeners to make a snap decision in your favor. Fast Talk can convince others to do things against their better judgment, but not to do anything they firmly believe is wrong. It *can* distract them long enough to make it too late to take positive action.

You may substitute a Fast Talk roll for any reaction roll to get a Good reaction (failure gives a Bad reaction). Charisma and Voice modify Fast Talk rolls if it is used in speech.

Fast Talk is short term; if the subject spends a few minutes thinking he comes to his senses. To persuade someone permanently, use Rhetoric. There is an important exception, some people would rather look like idiots than admit to making an error, and may act on a decision even if they know it was wrong. Fast Talk works best when the subject won't think about the decision before acting on it; so it won't close a major purchase, where the sucker is certain to worry about the details, but it might sell Flavorless Potato Chips, since few people think deeply about such purchases. Fast Talk is also used to compose advertising, PR talks, political speeches and other inspiring but low content appeals. To influence the reactions of most of a mass audience roll against the lower of the Bard of the orator and the Fast Talk of the speech writer. [Drop the +2 if allowed to talk and make the skill rolls]

Gesture

[Drop this skill. Realistically gestures are highly cultural and easily misunderstood. Use IQ rolls for the observers (not the gesturers) to convey a really simple idea via gesture. Conversion: use Hobby/Charades, or Gesture! if the campaign is sufficiently cinematic]

Grammar[language] (IQ/Ave) Language-6

Knowledge of the vocabulary, sounds, sentence structure and formal rules of a language. Grammar checks can be used to recognize an obscure word, catch a grammatical error, think of synonyms, or tell the origin of a word. This is also the skill used to edit manuscripts for style and grammar (not content).

Grammar is not a language task skill, there is no penalty for low fluency. High skill does not imply any ability to use the language well; it may just mean you sound like a heavily rehearsed thesaurus reading.

Interrogation

This skill is not dependent on language, except you won't learn anything if you can't understand what the victim is saying.

Interviewing (IQ/Hard) IQ-6 Psychology-4

The ability to gain information from conversation or casual discussion. Use Interrogation for rigorous questioning sessions. A successful roll will tell you how the subject reacts to a topic - he is tense or lying about it, finds it dull, has no special interest or guilty knowledge about it, and so on. Winning a contest of Interviewing vs. IQ, Acting or Fast Talk will tell you what part of the topic is involved.

Extracting information from casual conversation requires about 5 minutes per question. A more personal question, or a wary approach to hide your interest, requires 15 minutes per attempt. A successful roll reveals any information the subject would tell a friend, a failure by 5 or more indicates you were deceived in some way.

You may also use this skill to phrase questions to helpful subjects to bring out details they might otherwise omit. Make a skill roll to obtain all the useful details of story or description.

Empathy gives a +4 bonus. If the subject is of a different species there is a penalty of -2 or more.

Journalism

Use Composition and Interviewing.

Language Lore (IQ/Average) IQ-5, Linguistics-2

You are familiar with a great many languages, and know many trivial details about their distribution, history, grammatical structures, unusual features and so on. You can identify a common language or dialect from a short sample of speech or writing by making a skill roll, and can place an obscure one by at least region and language family the same way.

Linguistics (IQ/Hard) IQ-6

The study of the common principles of language, the process of language change, and ways of describing languages.

Uses include recording a language accurately, writing language learning materials, writing natural language software, and proving the relationship between languages. With proper records of several related languages you can reconstruct the ancestral language and the pattern of descent. Technically linguistics does not require knowledge of any non-native languages, but realistically it is probably impossible to acquire without picking up 2 or 3 languages to at least the half-point level.

[Linguistics *does not* aid in learning languages. Characters with the Linguistics skill from the Basic Set should substitute this skill if the character concept uses it as a science. Buy Language Talent if it was purchased to minimax language skills]

Lip Reading (IQ/Ave) no default

The ability to interpret a known language by watching the lips of a human speaker. You must see the speaker's face (he can always foil you by covering his mouth). Range, darkness, cover or other vision penalties apply to the skill roll, and prevent its use at all if they total -4 or more.

Less than half of speech is visible on the lips. A skill roll reveals only the general nature of a conversation. To get the exact words of a specific sentence, or any specific name, requires an additional skill roll.

Literature [language] (IQ/Hard) Language-6

The study of the belle-letters, the body of prose, poetry and other work celebrated for their excellence, either of technical style or aesthetic appeal depending on the school of literary criticism. It includes knowledge of motifs, symbolic and stylistic elements, and subjective expressive factors.

Literary Lore [specialization] (IQ/Ave) Special

You are familiar with the major works of "literature" in your specialty. You know the characters and plots, and can identify common quotations and allusions. Like most language task skills, knowledge of the language of the works is required (unless translations are available).

Specializations include a time period (medieval literature), region (American literature), literary form (poetry, drama), medium (film, VR software), author (Shakespeare, Twain), genre (chivalric romances, science fiction), or specific body of work (Bible criticism, European manuscript chronicles).

Type of information specializations (quotations, publication histories) can also be allowed. Many specializations overlap, the GM may set defaults between them. The special default is to [(language) belle lettres] from Literature[(language)-0, or IQ-6 in your native language.

Logic (IQ/Hard) IQ-6 Philosophy-2 Law-4 any Science-4

The application of sound reasoning to practical problems, semantics and the construction of arguments. This is classical logic, informal and inductive methods (deriving plausible general principles from specific events) are at least as important as deductive logic. Modern logic (symbolic logic, set theory, Boolean algebra) is covered by the Mathematics skill.

Mimicry (HT/Hard) IQ-6, HT-6

The ability to mimic sounds. You can reproduce familiar bird calls, animal sounds, or human voices, limited to the volumes possible for your vocal apparatus. In the case of voices you can produce the general sound of voices, or parrot a specific phrase. To actually speak in someone else's voice requires the Voices skill and appropriate fluency.

Anyone casually familiar with the sound can be fooled on a simple success. Those intimately familiar with it get a contest of IQ or Naturalist to notice something odd about it. Animals use the rule of 12 in this contest if the sound is important to them. If successfully fooled they usually either approach to investigate or flee, depending on what the sound was.

[Drop the distinction between bird calls and animal sounds and the Voice bonus]

Oral Literature

[Drop. Bardic Lore covers knowing a lot of oral literature. Standard literature skill is used to analyze works.]

Oratory

Use Bard to deliver speeches, Fast Talk or Rhetoric to write them.

Phonetics

Use Linguistics for the science; Grammar, Voices and Teaching for a speech therapist.

Picture Writing

Use Literacy and Calligraphy instead.

Poetry (IQ/Ave) IQ-5 Language-5

The ability to compose poetry and lyrics (hymns, flower-songs...) in any familiar style. Buy Literature or Literary Lore[poetry] to learn the styles of other cultures or eras. A success is a good poem, but a critical success is needed for enduring artistic value.

Short poems such as Haiku can be composed in seconds at -4, or normal skill in a few minutes. Longer poems will require longer to polish. Apply up to +/-4 for the amount of time available to work on the poem.

In some cultures speaking in verse has special status, it may be more honorable, or more likely to get a hearing, or required of certain personages or on ceremonial occasions. A Poetry roll each minute allows this to be done credibly. This skill is not used to recite poems (use Bard) or to recall them (use Bardic Lore[poetry]) In many cultures skilled

poets gain a reaction bonus, buy this as a separate Reputation.

Punning

[The prerequisite is Fluency 12 or better.]

Rhetoric (IQ/Ave) IQ-5

The art of persuasion. Rhetoric falls between Fast Talk and Logic, appealing both to the emotions and to reason. Unlike Fast Talk, those convinced by Rhetoric will not later feel cheated; they may decide your arguments are wrong, but will not think them deceptive. On the other hand rhetoric is less flexible than Fast Talk and takes more time. You need at least some facts to build an argument, and several minutes to deliver it.

Like Fast Talk, Rhetoric will not persuade someone to injure his own interests or violate his ethics unless it furthers a goal he finds more important. Rhetoric is the primary skill of informal debaters, communications majors, and the better speech writers and advertisers. In a jury trial it may substitute for Law, in parliamentary debate for Politics.

Sign Language

[Treat sign languages exactly like any other language. If a character has an undefined skill, 'Sign Language' give him the points in the most common specific one in the campaign]

Singing

This is not a language task skill. Fluency influences the Bardic Lore roll needed to get the words *right*, not your ability to sing the ones you are using attractively.

Skaldic Lore

Alternate name for Bardic Lore.

Speed Reading

[CO p17 Buy a better level of Literacy instead.]

Speed Reading [orthography] (IQ/Average) no default

Prerequisite: Fluency and Literacy 12+

Speed-reading is the art of selectively skimming a text; it must be learned separately for each orthography (language and script combination). You must make a Speed reading roll to get the general idea of a text, and for **each** significant detail you want to remember later. Each doubling of your reading speed gives you -2 to the skill roll (base reading speed is about 1 page per minute). A critical failure means you are certain of a detail, but wrong.

Storytelling

Use Bard to tell stories, Composition to create them.

Telegraphy

[BS p55. Drop knowledge of Morse code. This is just an alternate name for Electronic Operation [Telegraph]. Any communications system requires an Operation skill to use the equipment, but it is not a language task skill. Composing or understanding a signal may require a separate Literacy (e.g. Morse is a phonetic literacy, the large flag code books are logographic literacies if they are actually memorized) but often does not.

Translation

There is no specific translation skill, but you must be fairly fluent in both languages to do a credible job. Alternating translation, or translating text, requires a fluency of 10 in both languages; simultaneous running translation requires skills of 12.

Ventriloquism (IQ/Ave) no default

The ability to make your voice seem to come from elsewhere. It is an illusion, a successful roll fools your audience, not the physics of sound! It can't change the general direction of your voice (i.e. you can't throw your voice behind someone facing you). Modifiers include range (-3 per yard to the desired source) and the plausibility of the apparent source (+/-3).

Voices (IQ/Ave) IQ-5 Acting-3 Performance-3

You can change the sound of your voice. You can make your voice unrecognizable or imitate specific tones of voice, dialects or foreign accents on a simple skill roll.

You can also try to imitate an individual voice. People casually familiar it can be fooled by a simple success (e.g. imitating the voice of a famous screen star as a party trick), but people who know the voice well get a contest of IQ vs. Voices to resist (e.g. trying to convince said screen star's current lover over the phone). Early TL7 voice recognition systems can only be fooled by a critical success, TL8+ systems cannot be fooled by this skill at all. You can only imitate voices if you know what they sound like. Voices training includes exposure to a wide range of languages and accents (with the side benefit that you can identify a language or accent with a Voices roll) but if you have never heard someone speak you cannot try to imitate their voice.

In situations where a slip could be critical, a roll may be required every minute to maintain a false voice.

Writing

Depending on the character concept substitute Composition, Rhetoric or Grammar[language]. As it appears in GURPS China, substitute Rhetoric and Calligraphy[Hanzi].



Paranoia: Travel and Transport

Brendan Evans

Daily Travel

Clones will find themselves travelling almost every day, sometimes for most of the day. Almost all travel involves Trainbots and/or walking. Walking is the most popular way of travel. It is reliable, on time and cheap.

1. Trambots are very similar to trains. They often connect cubicle complexes with a local set of stores and a transport hub.
2. Trains are mostly on time, mostly clean, mostly quick and mostly safe. They travel from transport hub to transport hub via tubes. These tubes allow the trains to travel both under and over level 0. There are many hubs and many lines for the trains to travel on. It can be quite confusing to common traveller.
3. Bot Urban tranSport's (BUS's) are rarely on time, rarely seen, and rarely go where you need to go. They are all staffed by grumpy old bots that insist on checking tickets and checking identification badges. Both the BUS's and the drivers are well armoured and armed.
4. Clone Auto Rapid transbot's (CAR's) are rarely owned by clones. They are very expensive and typically only high level clones and media stars can afford to own them. The closest most clones will come to a CAR is if they are lucky enough to get run over by one.

Ultraviolet Knowledge

5. Rumours about the Transport System. Expressing such rumours may be Treason. Or it might not be. The timetables change every day at random times. Generally not true.
 - * There are mutants living in the train line tubes. Mostly untrue.
 - * The tubes can take you to abandoned areas and even outside. Occasionally true.
 - * The transport ticket machine's rarely work. True.
 - * The penalties for not having a valid ticket are draconian. True.
 - * Touching the third rail causes electrical shock. Almost always true. The clones touching it glow on then off then on then off.
 - * BUS drivers are ex-Vulture Craft drivers. Generally true.
 - * The BUS drivers suffer from combat flashbacks. Sometimes true.
 - * The Alpha/Melba Complex Transport Map is actually incomprehensible. Mostly true.
 - * The Alpha/Melba Complex Transport Map offers a way out of Alpha Complex. *bang!* *bang!* *bang!*

Travel Industry (Red Version)

Right now you're shaking you're head and wondering if I'm kidding. How on earth can there be travel?

Well rumours of travel actually occurring are rare, as are survivors of said rumoured travel, but everyone knows someone who worked with someone who reported to someone who traveled. And every now and again, there are advertisements on the TV announcing we've made progress in the great war, and we've conquered new lands, and made holiday resorts out of them.

You don't know anyone who's ever gone and come back though to tell you what it was like.

There was one guy - BORNO-R-LSR-2 - who went off to go on holiday, but there was a terrible transbot accident when he was coming back from the airport and he never survived, so you didnt get to question him about it. you only

remember because you stole some of his belongings that he'd left behind in his locker when you heard he wasn't coming back.

Plus there are new employment opportunities being offered; Travel consultants, bag handlers, transport reception, traffic controllers..

Travel Industry (Ultraviolet Version)

Friend Computer knows it has an overpopulation problem

1. Friend Computer knows it needs to act quick
2. Friend Computer sees the pods as one way of saving space
3. Friend Computer has people moving into the pods, but needs more at a faster rate
4. Friend Computer tells the drones it has build a new luxurious holiday complexes
5. Friend Computer tells the drones that these complexes are far away in different locales (beaches, snow, you name it)
6. Friend Computer tells the drones they can travel there now on their holidays
7. Friend Computer tells the drones to book the time off with their union supervisors and to visit a travel agent now
8. Tada! the travel industry was born

Of course actual travel in Paranoia should be as different from the glossy brochures as possible. Where there is comfortable seats in the brochures there will be wooden benches in reality. Where there is smiling hostesses to attend to your every need in the brochures, there will be a surly, overweigh Vulture Trooper. And so on; a key theme of Paranoia is that advertised and actual reality is somewhat different. Milk it.

What's the difference between

1. a trip to another complex that you don't come back from
2. a trip to the local food hall that you come back from
3. a trip to the local food hall that you don't come back from
4. a trip to the trouble-shooter briefing room that you don't come back from
5. a trip to the food recyclers that you don't come back from
6. a trip to another "safer friendlier" complex (that you paid a lot of credits for) that you don't come back from

The answer is "perspective".

What if Friend Computer knew the complex was overcrowded and needed to get rid of citizens in a more sneakier way?

What if a secret society discovered a list of "mutants" and wanted them removed from society?

What if you caught a trainbot and there was an accident and you died?

What if you caught a trainbot and there was an accident and you got turned into soylent green?

There's not much difference between a trainbot to another complex and a trainbot to the food recyclers if you're not coming back either way .

What if there actually was other complexes and it was possible to come back?

What if the other complexes were supposedly the same as your home complex, but they weren't?

What if every four yearcycles there was a competition among the best of the complex's athletes to see who could win official gold recognition badges? What if some complexes allowed some athletes to take enhancements?

What if other secret societies thought this would be a good time to make their mark? What if secret societies actually did have contacts to the other complexes and organised mass rallies by pretending to go to the competitions as cheer

squads?

What if (now this takes some concentration)....

The commies knew that if they could win the clonelympics they could show the world how powerful communism was. Even if they had to take drugs to win it. Even if they had to infiltrate Free Enterprise so that they could buy the best team money could buy. That way when they revealed to the world that they were actually commies (on the winning dias) of course, then they'd show up Free Enterprise as well as the world. And what if free enterprise knew all this but intended to make the commies loose so badly that when they were exposed the commies would look silly?

To really go silly, there could be Free Enterprise clones who didn't want to string the commies along and wanted to win because even if the commies were exposed, Free Enterprise would still look silly for going along with it, so why not make sure the free enterprise athletes win.

And there's always a chance that one of those new internal security clones listening to his wiretap might say to himself "you know I'm really not sure they've committed a crime yet, so why not let them go to the Olympics and make themselves guilty. We'll have heaps of troops around anyway"..

Of course before, during and after the clonelympics there would be service groups vying for rights to build, clean, teardown, recycle the area/buildings/rubbish/etc.. And who would attend these clonelimpics - why selected high ranking officials and the infrared drones in their masses - got to keep them entertained and distracted from their depressing surrounds.

Or maybe the clonelympics are just rumours, and only the upper levels of society get to attend. What happens when the free enterprise types bootleg some stolen passes and the infrared masses turn up with tickets?

Or maybe the matrix people turn up and use the matrix to set amazing clone records. Of course anyone doing so well is immediately accused of cheating and is investigated. Be a good spot to get some publicity.

The clonelympics could allow drugs to be used, which could lead to R&D trying out a lot of things.

The armed forces are out in force to protect the drones and to represent. They're the armed forces they have to be bigger stronger tougher and faster than everybody else.

Every secret society in every town will want to take advantage of the possibility of HUGE meets with all the members. or maybe the possibility of killing lots of the ppl attending other secret society meetings.

This all started with some thoughts about the tourism aspects of Alpha Complex but then wondered where tourists would go. There could be "educational" trips to other complexes, clone exchanges (imagine a swap of "prisoners of war" except that Friend Computer has no "prisoners of war" alive so it sends some trouble-shooters in disguise. It's a pity that a) the clones didn't know there was a war and b) they didn't know they were posing as clones from the other side of the war.) holidays, reward trips, punishment trips. Lots of potential there.

Clone trafficking isn't Treason is it?

Reliance on NPCs

Sean Nittner, www.sadric.com

Six friends sit down together, enjoying each other's company and preparing for a game to begin. The GM and is sitting at the end of a table, collecting notes, arranging books for reference and preparing for the game. He might not even be taking part in the conversation the players are having, his mind is on the game to come.

When the game starts, the five players, who up to moments ago had interest in each other, all turn their attention to the GM and begin interacting nearly exclusively with him. Specifically, their characters are interacting with his characters (the NPCs), instead of their fellow players (the PCs). When the PCs do interact it is often to agree on a plan or share information or do other administrative work, but the excitement comes from interacting with the GM's characters. Finding out what secrets they know, becoming friends, lovers, rivals, or bitter enemies. The problem is that the GM is one person trying to provide interaction to all of the players, who for the most part, are ignoring each other. Does this ever happen to you? It happens to me all the time.

I've been thinking about why this happens and what the players get out of NPC interactions that they don't get out of relationships between the other PCs. For the purpose of this discussion, I'm not addressing any kind of GM knowledge that the players might get from the mouths of the NPCs. I appreciate that has a valid place in the game. I'm really focusing on building relationships, and why players prefer to build them with the GM's characters instead of their fellow players. Here are the two reasons I came up with: safety and agenda.

What do I mean by "safety" and "agenda"? Let's start with the easy one, safety. Players are protective not only of their characters' well being, but also of the group status quo. If the group turns against each other, it can very easily be the end of a game. However if a player wants her character to do something which will affect another fictional character's emotional state, doing that thing to an NPC does not endanger the group status quo. My swashbuckling miscreant can make a fool out of the governor while seducing his son and that might make for a great story of tragic love, corrupt power and daring heroics, assuming the governor and his son are both safely in the hands of the GM. But if another player controls those characters, I might have just broken a social contract by de-protagonizing the governor and trapping his son in romantic entanglements. If I'm successful in getting what I want, I may just have damaged the group fun.

And what if my roguish cunning fails me? Were the son to be an NPC, I can engage in the game mechanics to see if my character seduces him. But another player? Even if we're using a game with social mechanics such as Burning Wheel, if the other player doesn't accept my offer, they can shut me down, creating a dead end for my character. In this instance the group status quo may be preserved but my own pride is wounded. One way or the other, if my fellow players don't like the story elements I propose, it is much safer for me to introduce those elements to the NPCs, where I can at least hope that the GM will be receptive to them and if my character fails or succeeds she can do so on terms that don't upset the other players or humiliate me.

Assuming I get over the fears of rejection or peeving another player, I still need to consider the agenda of my fellow players. My experience is that most players are interested first and foremost in their own character, followed by elements like plot, other player characters, and the quality of the story being told. There is good reason for this prioritization. In many games that limit the narrative control players have, their only sense of agency in the fiction comes through their character, so naturally, it is their own character they focus on.

Can you get a sense of the problem here? If each player is focused on her own character's agenda, how is she going to react when I bring my character into her life? Sure, if we happen to have shared goals, the characters may unite around

them. But if my young delinquent approaches the governor's son (in this case a player character) with a romantic proposal and the player is focused on the son gaining power in legislature, the politics will win out every time. In this case I've made an offer and rather than hurt the other player or feel shut down myself, the other players just don't have any interest because it's not central to their agenda.

We have five players all trying to get emotional and meaningful interactions out of one GM, rather than acknowledging the potential for creating those interactions with each other. The game might be wonderful, and everyone might be having a good time, but they are getting less out of it than they could, and they are taxing the poor GM with the ridiculous responsibility of wearing every important hat in the game.

Here are my solutions, and like every other idea about gaming, they might work for your group or not. So pick and choose or adapt as needed. Start with talking to each other. At the table, during the game, and OUT of character. I think there is a stigma about not breaking character and not being willing to discuss what's going on in the game between players. That is a topic on its own, however. Assuming we can get past this barrier, talking to your fellow players and telling them your intent upfront gives them a chance to process your ideas and see how they resonate before being confronted with them in game.

If I tell another player I'm interested in our characters forming a romantic relationship, it gives them an opportunity to discuss their own comfort level and negotiate with me as a player before we make it happen (or not) in game. This particularly takes the sting out of antagonistic relationships. If I tell another player I think our characters should become enemies because of something in game then it immediately makes it clear that as a player I have no ill feelings. Sometimes we can't prepare for tense moments, they are just sprung upon us and we realized we're navigating unknown waters in game. Despite the desire to maintain the illusion of the game, I still advocate taking a break and asking the other players if what is happening in the game is something they really want to do before proceeding. Personally, I like to do as much of this before the game even starts as possible. Spirit of the Century has a great character creation system that forces the players to negotiate their characters into each other's lives before the game even starts as "guest stars" in their pulp novels.

The GM has another tool to use as well, NPCs that foster player character interaction. When GMing I make NPCs that are connected to more than one PC so as soon as one player starts interacting with them, the other player is interested. When a player comes to an NPC looking for something meaningful, I'll offer it but I drag another player in the middle as well. If the first character has a blood feud against an NPC, that NPC has been working with another PC, or has wronged them as well and both PCs want their own brand of justice. Either way, my hope is to deflect the interaction away from the GM and back to the players, giving them grist for the mill. I use the NPCs to create a common interest between the players.

My last solution is a cheat, but it works. Kill the GM. Seriously, the most moving game I've played in recently was inside a hotel room at GenCon, where all four players were playing high school friends seeing each other for the last time as they went to college. What kept that dramatic energy inside our group was that Ribbon Drive (the game we were playing) doesn't have a GM. There was no where to turn but to each other.

If this article made you think, please let me know. I've reposted it on my Livejournal at: <http://seannittner.livejournal.com/>. Please comment and let me know your NPCs woes or solutions.

Via Negativia II: Metagaming, Anachronisms and

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Diegesis

by Lev Lafayette

A General Theory

Deriving somewhat from the "Big Model" [1] theory of game design, I express agreement that the primary consideration of a roleplaying game is the social contract, or, how people should relate to each other with the agreement that 'this is a game' which has particular communicative norms [2] and particular purpose of exploration [3]. Immersive exploration can be damaged by a failure in plausibility in either the realist or rhetorical representation of the narrative [4]. In roleplaying people must come first (social contract, behaviour expectations), exploration second (immersion, richness of setting, genre), system a modest third. This article concentrates on the second component and should be read as a companion to a previous publication in the first issue RPG Review which concentrated on poor system design [5]. If, as readily recognised, the capacity for exploration is best achieved through immersion where the player's consciousness is engrossed in the shared imaginary space then it is those things that jar the immersive environment that can be readily identified as damaging to the possibility of exploration. As examples this article looks at metagaming, anachronisms, and diegesis.

Metagaming

Metagaming is the treatment of a game environment with acknowledgement that they are 'inside' a game. In certain situations, metagaming can indeed be useful means to re-associate reality within the game world, such as military strategists who pause to consider the political ramifications or even human suffering that is not represented by a wargame. In computer gaming it is used in reference to player exploitations of coding errors, or even very typical actions such as saving a character other than at the cessation of the game session. In roleplaying metagaming has been defined as "inferring in-game knowledge" that is inappropriate for your character from out-of-game information" [6]. A psychological example of metagaming is expressed in the D&D 3.5 Dungeon Master's Guide: "I figure there'll be a lever on the other side of the pit that deactivates the trap", a player says to the others, 'because the DM would never create a trap that we couldn't deactivate somehow'.[7]

There are many other examples of metagaming of players using their knowledge in contrast to the character's knowledge. A variant of the first example is players giving advice to other players when their characters have no means to communicate to each other. In reference to game mechanics, a player may be able to quote the AD&D Monster Manual verbatim and use that knowledge in-game when there is no way the character could know it; as an aside I have seen this reversed, where one player had their character deliberately cast lightning bolt at a Shambling Mound - the player knew full-well what the effect would be! Another example (again from AD&D) is a player, familiar with high-school physics, calculating how high they would have to be to effectively cast a Feather Fall spell (this was an example in an old Dragon magazine), when of course the player's wizard character would be operating with a very different set of equations. Finally, with a reference similar to programming errors in a computer game, a player can have their character engage in a series of actions which give their character an advantage because the rule system has a significant glitch, even when it would make no sense in dramatic representation for the character to do; an example would be a Dwarf from Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (1st edition) deciding not to wear armour as their innate toughness would be better than even metal armour.

Metagaming can also be described in terms of "gamespeak", the use of system mechanics to provide narrative description. This too can break the sense of exploration, as explained in RuneQuest when two descriptions of a melee conflict are provided, one where the attack and parry dice-rolls, numerical hit location, numerical damage, and quantity of armour absorption are expressly stated and compared with a descriptive enunciation of the same effects without reference to the numerical representation. The text continues, quite correctly, "[c]olorful, interesting language helps everyone participate in the fantasy" [8], i.e., by describing a game as a narrative the sense of immersive exploration is

enhanced. John Tyne's Puppetland pushes this advice to the limit by insisting that if the players must express actions 'in character' and no out-of-game talk can be conducted whilst a player is seated at the gaming table; to state something out-of-game they have to stand up [9], a feature not dissimilar to LARPs with players mimicking a voice balloon to symbolise that they are speaking out-of-character.

In contemporary narrativist games, a form of metagaming exists where the players take a "Director's Stance" and describe the reality that their characters are interacting with, which includes the expenditure of resources (e.g., Karma Points in Marvel Superheroes, Hero Points in HeroQuest) to change the success rate of the character in the reality. This is certainly out-of-character, but importantly, it remains within the generation of the shared imaginary space which is equivalent to the different meanings attached to the prefix 'meta-'; representing either stepping outside and beyond (e.g., metaphysics) or representing a change (e.g., metamorphosis). Such benefits are typically represented as an in-game resource and are typically acquired through immersive-supporting action, such as advancing the storyline and good roleplaying. Since their introduction such benefits have been used as either a form of experience points (e.g., Champions, GURPS) or experience points and narrative changes (e.g., HeroQuest). Only in one instance, an obscure rule in a Rolemaster Companion, is such benefits available for narrative changes only, with character power advanced in the usual fashion [10]. As a final example of 'in game' meta-(beyond)gaming with a meta-(change)gaming solution would be the problem of players spending not inconsiderable time planning the actions of their characters in a combat situation, when in reality the characters would be acting almost by instinct. DragonQuest, in order to simulate the skill of Military Scientist, allowed the player to stop the game for a period of time equal to their character's ability $(20 + (10 * \text{Rank}))$ seconds [11] so the player could assess situation.

Anachronisms

In literature, anachronisms are usually described as an error in chronology, such as the placing of an individual, event, object or custom that is contrary to the expected timeline. It does not refer to, for example, narratives which are deliberately written out of sequence such as that used by speculative fiction writer William S. Burroughs. There is an emphasis on the term 'expected timeline'. In particular forms of fiction where anachronisms are expected due to various weaknesses in the space-time continuum or time-travel itself (e.g., Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court") and, of course, science-fiction writers can often be overtaken by changes in the realworld itself, both social and especially technological (Traveller was quite famous for having computer systems that were less powerful than those available of equivalent vintage). A particularly famous social example in the must surely be Twilight 2000 which, written in the 1984, speculated a nuclear and conventional war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in the year 2000 which of course, did not eventuate. Again the emphasis is on "expected timeline"; the EDIT roleplaying game, based the Terran Trade Authority series of books from the late 1970s and early 80s, which speculated a spacefaring society in the 21st century, met some criticism displeasure when the authors tried to push the starfaring activities back a hundred years and shoehorn contemporary political reality.

Perhaps the most common anachronism in fantasy roleplaying is the way societies are presented. On one hand, they are expressly medieval in technology and political structure, with a hereditary ruling class of nobles. The same does not apply either for custom or the bottom end of the political system. The power of religious institutions is usually curtailed to one equal in contemporary secular society; that is, they have influence, and often undue influence, but they are politically independent from the institutions that rule temporal affairs. It seems to be a matter of historical veracity that under theological rule, and especially monotheistic theological rule, that such societies discriminate harshly against the female sex. With a premodern standard of technology and a ruling class with absolute power and divine right, it is fairly inevitable that the majority of the population would be either slaves or serfs. Likewise, with such minimal knowledge and experience of extra-regional cultures, racism and religious bigotry are not just widespread but usually result in murderous reaction.

Most typically, the method of dealing with this glaring anachronism is to partially ignore it in favour of liberal-democratic sensibilities of late 20th century modernism and to displace the less palatable components into other forms of discrimination. In (A)D&D this is most famously achieved through an association of entire cultures and races with

moral and political alignment which, at least in the case of races, is argued to be innate [13]. Thus, a theocratic society with instituted sexism that practises slavery and serfdom is only found in those societies and among those races with an 'evil' moral alignment. Instead of hereditary rule, the ability of the character in their profession to perform a task becomes the means by which lordship, high priesthood, even guildmaster of a thief's den! The game system creates a political meritocracy which is not even present in the most enlightened of contemporary societies.

The other methods of dealing with social anachronisms that may otherwise have a distasteful approach is simply to accept them as a flexible reality. This can be achieved through alterations to the world-setting; Glorantha, for example, has slavery among the barbarians of Prax, a Germanic-Celtic sense of sexual equality, autonomy and thanehood among the Sartarites, and a Roman Empire cosmopolitan approach towards sexuality, sexual equality and other culture among the Lunars. Other character-centred solutions allow for player-characters to be special in a way that does not appear contrived, and nor provides an unrealistic advantage of political and social equality. In this respect point-buy systems such as GURPS have quite an advantage in avoiding the due perils of anachronisms and having a player being forced to roleplay a character subject to profound discrimination. Want to play a female knight? Fine, take the discrimination disadvantage (for realism's sake), but effectively buy off the negative effects through the advantages of Status and Reputation. Thus, in both RuneQuest and GURPS social anachronisms are avoided whereas in (A)D&D they are sublimated.

In the narrative as well, anachronisms can serve as a jarring reminder that one is in a game universe. In the excellent essay originally posted to USENET, "Crimes Against Mimesis" [13], several examples are given in for Interactive Fiction computer games. Objects out of context, such as a chainsaw on a dining table, the jumbling of genres (e.g., an efficient medieval banking system), puzzles out of context, the treatment of NPCs as puzzle-pieces with a specific narrative utility. Further, I wish to suggest there is also a matter of stylistic and thematic anachronisms. To be sure, this is a narrative rather than simulation approach. In the real world, life does not follow a formula of introduction, rising tension, climax and denouement, although that model can certainly be applied to particular situations. In the real world, life can be alternatively serious, light-hearted and themes and motifs are expressed in a myriad of forms. In the shared imaginary space of a speculative setting, due to our own expectations of literary conventions, such a lack of narrative flow, rapid variation of stylistic concerns and contradictory themes and motifs will also damage the immersive quality. It is far better to stick to a set of particular expressions from the literary model [14] and keep to it.

Diegesis

Diegesis is the telling of a story as opposing to the showing or enacting (mimesis), a definition and distinction was first enunciated by Plato [15]. At first consideration, this would seem to be how most roleplaying games work, after all, it is only in the most LARP-like performances to players actually engage in charades of their character's activities. However, in the definition, Plato specifies that the act of diegesis does not allow for genuine roleplaying itself; rather it is an opinion and expression of the speaker's account of events. In diegesis; "the poet is speaking in his own person; he never leads us to suppose that he is any one else"; when imitating, the poet produces an "assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture". Whilst there is a subtle level of diegesis in a roleplaying game, commonly introduced by the narrator or whoever has the director's stance, in the formulation of thematic considerations or symbolic motifs, an explicit diegesis is contrary to the immersive exploration of the shared imaginary space.

John Wick's Legend of the Five Rings [16] states the problem quite explicitly: "Show, Don't Tell", the rules advise and two examples are given where a failed group of Bushi and Shugenja are confronted by their lord. In the first, diegetic example, the narrator simply explains "He's angry. He's very unhappy you guys messed up". In the second, mimetic example, the anger and unhappiness isn't stated, it is expressed through the comments and tone of the lord; in other words it is acted out and the characters receive not an emotional description, but an enactment of the emotion itself, thus encouraging involvement in dramatic experience. The descriptive expressions from the narrator are of particular sensory inputs to the characters, rather than the emotional responses that the characters should receive from those inputs.

An alternative point of view of the role of diegesis is advocated by the Meilahti School [17] in roleplaying theory arguing that the game must have a diegetic framework, which defines what is true within the game and game world. The framework defines truth determination in the hands of the gamemaster with degrees surrendered by the GM to the players in accord to the amount of director's stance that the GM allows - rather like anarchy being those areas of life where the State has decided not to intervene. The player's role is a subject position within the diegetic frame, and subject to approval by the gamemaster. Whilst players have their own interpretations of the role, like a reader constructs their own interpretation in a novel, or a audience member in a play, or even an actor with their character, the expression, in order to be formalised within the game, requires the GMs approval; thus the GM becomes the "gatekeeper of the diegesis".

Part of the definitional problem involves the dual and simultaneous role of players as characters. In film for example, non-diegetic elements can be used to enhance the immersive quality of the setting; such as mood music which, if one to disengage from the experience for a moment and analyse the elements of the film, they would note that the disjuncture between the audience absorbing the sound of the music in reference to the setting, whereas the characters are unaware of the music. Indeed, the inclusion of the music in a diegetic manner can reach the level of high parody, such as in *Blazing Saddles* where the new sheriff is riding to the sounds of "April in Paris" only to encounter a full band playing the song in the middle of the desert. In contrast, keeping the music within the film in a diegetic manner can be used as particularly powerful motif, such as *Casablanca's* "As Time Goes By".

It is argued that the system elements of a roleplaying are non-diegetic but this seems difficult to sustain. Certainly, they are non-diegetic to the narrative, but they are very much diegetic to the game. Thus it is better to express those elements, as has been done here, as a metagame diegetic consideration; players discussing their characters abilities in a non-narrative manner does not assist the immersive qualities, except in parody (e.g., the characters in *Order of the Stick* referencing various aspects of the game rules as they affect the characters). In contrast the recommended use of background music, costume, props etc such as recommended in the *World of Darkness* storyteller system [18] is certainly a extra-diegetic component for the purpose of mimesis - which although not real to the story or characters aids members of that external group - the players and audience, immerse themselves in the story and characters.

Conclusion: Immersion and Exploration

It is implausible that a fully immersive roleplaying environment can ever be created and nor should it. The "three enemies" of immersive exploration - metagaming, anachronisms and diegesis - each have their particular uses in aiding the development game design, setting and the experience of actual play. Yet, once again as per previous discussions of *via negativa*, the reason why these jarring examples are useful is that they provide an avenue for improvement towards the unattainable goal. By reducing the level of metagaming at the table during actual play, by resolving potential anachronisms in an acceptable manner, and by introducing extra-diegetic components to the game in a manner that tends towards mimesis, the game experience is richer for all concerned.

Endnotes

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- [12] See Gary Gygax's comments that a Paladin, when encountering Orc children, should put them to the sword as they will grow up with an evil

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Fallout 3 Review

By Andy Astruc

This is the way the world ends, with a series of enormous bangs.

If you're not familiar with the Fallout games, the skinny is that centuries ago (in an alternate timeline where the future is designed by people from the 1950s) there was a nuclear war, triggered by rapidly diminishing fossil fuel resources. China got all uppity about the US hogging all the oil and uranium, so they invaded Alaska. The United States of America doesn't stand for this type of thing, so they annexed Canada to fund their war effort and gave China the finger. Some time after this, the entire planet's surface caught on fire. The game is tight-lipped about who it was that fired the first mushroom cloud generator, but it's the least of anyone's worries now.

The present date is 2277 – 200 years after the Great War and a few decades after the previous games. Born underground in a government-sanctioned vault designed to save people from the nuclear bomb parties outside, you start the game by experiencing key moments in your young, claustrophobic life which double as both tutorial and character creation. The opening moment, it should be noted, is a first person perspective as you emerge from your mother's womb. Things are much less disgusting after that, as you learn to walk as a toddler, read your first book to choose your stats, get given a wrist-based computer for your 10th birthday, and take a disturbing high school exam to pick a character class.

As fun as all that is, this isn't a game about tiny, grey rooms. One morning you wake up to discover that your father has left the vault that nobody ever leaves, and now everyone in the place wants you dead. Time to leave, then. Stumbling outside, you are presented with the Capital Wasteland (post-apocalyptic Washington D.C.) in all its terrible, lonely glory.

More than any of the characters, the destruction of human civilization is the star of the show. The environment is breathtaking, and from the moment you step outside you really do feel like you've been dropped into everyone's very worst day. Most of the map is covered with burnt rock, dirt, destroyed bridges and skeletal city ruins. You'll come across only handfuls of people at a time, working hard just to survive in a world that doesn't like them very much. On the many long walks through the wasteland, between attacks by bored raiders and hyper-aggressive mutations, you will regularly find yourself with nothing but the whistle of the wind for company.

It's in this silence that you feel the game is daring you to do something. Anything.

Fallout 3 is big on freedom. All of Washington is open to you right from the outset – although, as a newbie adventurer most places will kick you in the kidneys. Your main goal is to find your missing parental unit, but it's unlikely that you will be able to stick to that path for long. Heading to the nearby settlement of Megaton (the now-infamous town built around an unexploded bomb) you will find someone who has seen your father, but you will also come across a perky shop owner who wants to write a book, a mercenary for hire, a shady man who wants you to become a mass murderer, a woman who wants some post delivered, a mouthy prostitute and countless other diversions to eat up your time.

There's a moment when you realise that, while this looks a lot like a first-person shooter, it's still an RPG under the hood. Questing and leveling up is your business, and business is good.



Aside from the main quest to find dear old dad and figure out why your life has been turned sideways, there are a handful of very involved side quests to sink your teeth into. They may have you conducting research on life in the Capital Wasteland, rescuing innocent townies from hulking mutant scum, or combating a fire-breathing pest problem to shut up a screaming child. These, coupled with the countless smaller tasks, mean that you may well be crushed under the weight of choice.

And choice is a big deal in the world of Fallout. Each act, from deciding to help a kid find his parents to wiping an entire town from existence, has karma attached to it – good or bad. Every situation provides you with the opportunity to be as good or as bad as you (or your character) wish to be. This will obviously change the quests you are given access to, but also the way that people in the world will react to you – murdering a town full of people is generally frowned upon. In the end, it will also decide how your game finishes.

Every action in the game is governed by the S.P.E.C.I.A.L. system - standing for Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, and Luck. Primarily this will influence your ability to talk and fight, but the system provides the magic box of random numbers that will affect how you approach a given situation, and whether you succeed or fail. You determine these values at the start of the game (by reading a book called "You're SPECIAL"), as well as picking skills and perks. Skills look after things like explosives, hacking, lock-picking, bartering, using different guns, science and medicine related actions and the ability to beat things with sticks. Perks are more specialised doohickeys, giving you special access to things like extra intelligence, an increased chance of exploding heads, and the ability to talk to women in a throaty voice.

But forget all that, it's time to fight. While the game does offer the chance to approach the post-apocalyptic wastes any way you want, there will be violence. The capital is covered with all manner of nasty foes, including but not limited to: oversized mole rats, murderous raiders, crab men, floating death-bots, super mutants, not quite as super mutants, mercenaries and radioactive cockroaches.

Luckily, you carry hot death in your pants. There's a satisfying variety of killing tools available to the Vault Dweller, ranging in effectiveness, style and fun level. You start off with nothing more than a baseball bat and a wimpy handgun, but never fear; before you know it you're firing sub machine guns, combat shotguns, assault rifles, and laser pistols. If you are the personal type, there is a wide array of melee weapons waiting for you: wrenches, knives, razors, lead pipes, axes, sledgehammers, pool cues, knuckle dusters and even the blatantly comical board with a nail in it. And if you get bored with that, there's a handheld nuke launcher to prove that humanity never learns.

The game still isn't a first-person shooter, though, and if you try to play it like one you will be disappointed, followed by dead. The real-time aiming is inaccurate and there's no real visceral feeling of your bullets hitting their mark. Enter V.A.T.S. – Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System. With the tap of a button, the action freezes and zooms in on the nearest target, flashing up a list of body parts and percentages representing the chance of scoring a hit. From here, you can choose where to shoot the enemy (legs, arms, torso, head or any other bit a creature has) and how many times, then sit back and watch it all unfold in slow motion from an awesome cinematic angle. If you're lucky, you might see the enemy's arm part ways with its owner in a shower of blood. The system is very satisfying and, oddly, never gets old.

Fallout 3 is not a perfect snowflake. It does have flaws, although they are not glaring. While the landscape of the Capital Wasteland is a sight to behold – both from a distance and up close – with great attention to detail present all over the map, the character models look like freakish zombie puppets. People glide awkwardly around the map, bumping into each other and doing their best to remind you they aren't real people. Adding to that are some major (often hilarious) problems with the AI.

Murder someone's family and they might hate you for a day, and then go back to being your best friend. Companions will dive in front of your bullets to end it all. Sometimes you'll be in the middle of an intense fight only to be interrupted by a small child calmly asking for your assistance. The voice acting contributes to this feeling of unreality, as a lot of the time it's as exciting as the local weather report.

But nit-picking is for nit-pickers, and Fallout 3 is a fantastic game. Never before has a game made a post-apocalyptic wasteland seem so real, and at the same time so engaging. Deep, satisfying combat and a massive area to explore will help to make sure you have lots of fun while you uncover all the stories and secrets the game has to offer. With too much to do and a multitude of ways to run through the game, you can easily clock up over 100 hours in Washington D.C. trying to see and do everything. It turns out the end of the world isn't so bad, after all.

Fallout 3 is available for MS-Windows, Playstation 3 and XBox 360

DISTRICT 9 Review

By Andrew Moshos

Directed by: Neill Blomkamp

It seems like a brilliant idea on paper. It even seemed like a brilliant idea in the promos and trailers and such. Truth be told it was the first genuine-seeming actual science fiction movie to pique my interest in a long time.

As the film begins, the premise is set out for us very quickly and easily. Twenty years ago, a huge alien vessel appeared above the skies of Johannesburg, South Africa. The aliens, for which we are never given a better title than prawns, are settled into a ghetto / township, all million plus of them.

The ghetto is cordoned off, and twenty years later, as an impetus to the current story we're supposed to be watching, the organisation tasked with corralling the prawns decides it needs to move the prawns 200 kilometres away because of tensions with the locals. Mostly because South Africans, white or black, don't want them there. They are seen, despite their hideous appearance, as really being nothing more annoying or dangerous than refugees.

The prawns live in squalor and filth, and though they are reasonably intelligent and can communicate via some kind of clicking - grunting language, they can't seem to do anything more complicated than rip open a can of cat food and gorge on it. This leads commentators to believe that the stranded aliens are some low order of drone within some insect-like hierarchy species.

How do I know that 'commentators' and academics have these opinions? Well, because the film spends an idiotic length of time devoted to talking heads talking about stuff as if they're helping us out with a complex topic. Instead of illuminating what's going on, these heads either repeat something we've already seen or foreshadow something that's coming.

That organisation tasked with controlling the prawns, called MNU, which is an amalgam of the UN and some kind of omni-transnational corporation which runs almost everything, is at least at first represented by the genial, goofy Wikus van der Merwe (Sharlto Copley), a bureaucrat with a heart of papery gold. He is given the job of organising the eviction, which, surprisingly enough, is not going to go smoothly.

What's funny about these early scenes is that despite the strangeness of the premise, the effecting of bureaucratic outcomes seems oddly comforting. Thus follow scenes where Wikus and his staff go door to door in the township trying to get prawns to sign paperwork that indicates they understand and agree to be evicted in the following days over to the concentration camp that will be District 10. It's insane, but it works specifically because it's not supposed to work. We realise early on that he's supposed to fail.

Just for you history buffs out there, all this 'district' stuff is an explicit reference to District 6, a ghetto that was rezoned as a 'whites only' area, prompting forced deportations of around 60,000 people who weren't presumably white to Cape Flats, twenty five kilometres away. This really happened back in the 1960s. Now, even the dumbest person watching probably figures that, being set in South Africa, this is probably the least subtle allegory in the history of science fiction allegories, seeing as such a setting with such complex racial relations must be thematically ripe for cinematic treatment in this way.

The thing is, what's funniest to me, is that South Africa itself, as it is today in reality, is a far more alien place than any fictional representation of it, here or anywhere else. Trying to figure out that Afrikaans accent, and trying to figure out just how the English South Africans, the Afrikaans South Africans and the African South Africans relate and tolerate each other is far more complicated and perplexing to me than how they all react to the presence of millions of insectoid aliens.

Wikus (pronounced Vick-us), for all his geniality and boyishness, is still a bureaucratic functionary, and a pretty naïve one at that. He leads the task force into the zone blithely ignorant as to the shitstorm that will result when a quasi-government-corporate body tries to forcibly move a million belligerent creatures. Watching him initially interacting

with the residents of District 9 is like watching a child juggling a working chainsaw and a car tire that's also on fire.

Try as you might, you just can't look away. Though early on we are given an impression that the prawns are pretty dumb and brutish, we see two of them at least conferring about a plan of theirs coming to fruition if only they can secure some more of something. That something is a crucial but unexplained maguffin that instigates everything in the movie, but in classic maguffin style, we never find out what it is, exactly.

We do get to see, however, what it can do.

The intelligent prawns hide the canister containing full-strength maguffin juice, which of course is stumbled upon by Wikus in his search for weapons. See, one of the lingering curiosities surrounding the prawns is the fact that they have brought with them nothing except these amazing weapons that only the prawns can use. MNU security personnel keep confiscating these weapons, which the prawns never use to bust out of District 9 en masse, but do give to evil Nigerian gangsters in trade for cans of cat food. I don't think it's any coincidence that the weapons, ranging from handguns that make their targets explode, to fully mobile battle armoured suits, look like something out of a videogame. In fact, many of them look suspiciously like they're out of the *Halo* series of games, which again is no coincidence, since Peter Jackson had tapped Neill Blomkamp to direct a Halo flick that never fortunately came to fruition.

Well, someone's excited about the prospect of using these weapons. Not Wikus, though, who has some profound problems of his own to now deal with after being exposed to the maguffin prawn juice.

Without giving too much away, Wikus transforms from being a happy-go-lucky nebbish into being someone pursued by everyone in South Africa mostly for nefarious ends. He desperately searches for a solution to his problems, which eventually leads him to somewhat befriend the only one of the prawns who sticks around long enough to make an impression, having the improbable name of Christopher Johnson.

Of Christopher's motivations and intentions, we know and learn nothing, although he does seem keen to get back to the mothership which looms perpetually over the Johannesburg skyline. When Wikus's problem comes glaringly to the fore, Christopher implies that he could help him if only they can get to the mothership with the canister of maguffin juice.

You'd think this'd be a relatively straightforward task, but no-one else shares their enthusiasm. In fact, the entirety of Johannesburg seems to be trying to stop them. The leader of MNU's special forces unit, - 1st Battalion - has especially taken a strong dislike to Wikus and intends to terminate him with extreme prejudice. That blue-eyed Afrikaaner is a scary motherfucker, way scarier than the aliens. To top things off, the leader of the Nigerians preying on the prawns, wheelchair-bound but still deadly, wants to eat Wikus in order to somehow absorb his new, um, abilities. I tell you, it's a nightmare when everyone wants a piece of you.

I guess it's handy for Wikus that, despite not being a soldier, he has access to a whole new arsenal of fantastic weapons, which eventually leads to the kinds of confrontations action movie-loving nerds are supposed to salivate over. The second half of the film is very much a full on action fest that builds and builds in terms of intensity and it supposed to be a well-earned payoff for our patience.

I'm not sure that it worked so much for me. I guess perhaps the intention was to get us to care about Wikus and his predicament before circumstance forces him into the action-hero mould, and it kinda works, mostly because Wikus is likable to an extent, even with his high-pitched whiney voice. But the plot kinda falls apart and wanders on for no real reason except for the fact that they feel the need for another protracted action scene. That the film could have ended half an hour earlier with the same outcome is not something I can ignore.

I call it the Isla De La Muerta mistake, named after the inexplicable need the makers of the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* flick felt that compelled them to take the story to what seemed like the climax at said location, only to wander off for another forty minutes pointlessly, only to return to the same fucking location for the ending that could just have easily happened the first time around.

I don't expect the phrase to gain currency in the film criticism world, but it sticks out for me. I don't think it's a bad film: far from it, I just don't think it's great. I don't know if it matters, really. It's such a great idea that I appreciate it

more than it probably deserves, even knowing that the end result is probably not as strong as it could have been. Whilst the effects representing the prawns are fantastic, I have lingering problems with how their species is represented within the story. They're less a metaphor for black South Africans living under apartheid, and more a plot device that knows its limited place. These guys aren't agitating for freedom, or for their rights as sentient, self-aware and intelligent beings: they just want some cat food.

All except for Christopher and his son, who seem to have some grander plan, one which is obscured from us, even past the film's end. Maybe an inevitable sequel, being called *District 10*, will clear things up, although in the wrong hands it'll probably just degenerate into an *Independence Day* rip-off.

Something should, I guess, be said about how the flick looks, as in it's meant to look like a pseudo-documentary with found footage (from handheld cameras, security cameras and the like), and talking head / interview footage spliced in as if it's a program for airing during a current affairs broadcast. Of course comparisons with *Blair Witch*, *Cloverfield* and, to a lesser extent, *Children of Men* are inevitable. It's inconsistently applied, and, truth be told it's pretty distracting.

The editing seems to have been set on the Michael Bay setting in certain parts, and the overblown soundtrack sounds like it was composed by Jerry Bruckheimer himself. Of course, no-one needs to tell me that Bruckheimer doesn't compose film scores, but you can tell the second you're watching any flick he's involved with from the head-pounding, overdone soundtracks.

It also is less than useless to have the fake talking heads commenting on stuff that's just happened or is about to happen to the protagonist. I'm happy to have them explain the history of the prawn's arrival, and the descriptions of their living conditions and the overall context or frame for the story. However. A quick note to both prospective filmmakers and accomplished ones like the protégés of big swinging dicks on the cinematic block like Peter Jackson: we don't need a fucking commentator commentating on something if all they're going to do is repeat exactly what happened. It's the worst, laziest and most cowardly of cinematic devices, and it shows a lack of confidence in your own flick. Fifty per cent of those worthless pseudo-interviews, where give us nuggets of wisdom as important as "No-one expected Wikus to do what he did then, or why" or "Who'd have thought that what was about to happen would happen?" could have been easily excised without harming the flick at all. It's almost but not quite self-parody, and at the very least it makes you wish the robots from *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* could be resurrected in order to tear those parts of the flick apart.

You know who might have expected what happened to happen? The goddamn audience, Neill and Peter. Any audience not dumb enough to understand a plot this simple is going to be too busy bugging livestock or buying lottery tickets to even understand your goddamn synopsis commentaries, ya lily-livered yellow bellies.

I didn't hate it, but I can't say that I utterly loved it either. Something about the action scenes didn't work for me, but the overall aesthetic of the flick, and the strange story appeal to me despite the flick's limitations and determination to eventually follow an action-y path that the earlier plot would lead you to think wasn't going to be obligatory. When it's dealing with the concept of just what the world would do if there was a visitation of this kind, it's interesting even if it seems mundane, to think about the logistics of housing and containing a million aliens of murky dispositions and intentions. When it reduces everything, ultimately, to explosions of CGI body parts, it's less engaging and less affecting.

It's an interesting idea. Maybe it'll grow on me with time. We shall see.

If we have enough time, that is.

7 times it seems awfully convenient that the maguffin juice could do everything that this flick required, making the word 'alien' synonymous with 'magical', out of 10

This review is originally published at: <http://movie-reviews.com.au/node/806>

LORD ORCUS LISTENS!

by Steve Saunders

Salutations, stinky mortals! Lord Orcus here... and I'm ready to get it on.

The column. I ready to get it on in regards to the column.

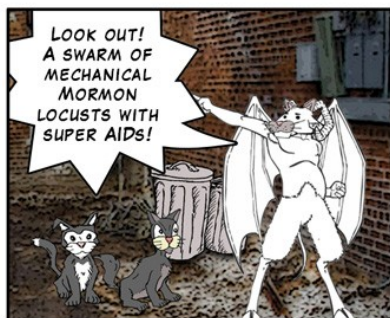
No, no. I don't think that has anything to do with it. Hmmm... *Maybe*. But let's move on, okay?

I said: **OKAY?!**

Ahem, so, anyway, as I was saying... Welcome to yet another column of LORD ORCUS LISTENS. It's always nice to get my LOL on, what with all you gorgeous and tasty—er, tasteful people writing in and asking me questions. It's good to be here. I understand that The RPG Review still wants me to write for them.

FOOLS! MUAHAHAHAHAHA! **FOOOOOOLLS!!!**

PAWpurrs



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I mean... It sure is mighty cool of them to let me strut my stuff right here in your eye-ready space. So, ON WITH IT!!!!

My editor, The Mighty Lev, forwarded me these particular questions, with the message "Don't be gentle with him!". Am I ever gentle, Lev? Seriously, unless you are Hetaera and are with me to, erm, service my fuzzy dice, along with a fascinating talk on the politics of Burkina Faso, being gentle is usually the last thing I ever want to do.

Okay, playing through Descent with Demogorgon as Overlord again is the last I ever want to do,

but that's beside the point. (FYI: He's a *dick*.)

Here are those questions, from one Zammon, Storm Bull Initiate of Prax.

60 RPG REVIEW ISSUE FIVE September 2009

Why are you so ugly?

Hmmm... Well, that's a very hurtful thing to ask someone right away, Zammon—I LOVE IT. I suppose it's because I am so damned handsome that said handsome wraps back around reality and then makes me ugly in turn. That's right: I'm so god damned hot I'm ugly. Or, more sadly, I failed my Comeliness roll. But, uh, um, we won't talk about that. Let's just blame quantum necromancy and move on.

Are you a half orc or a full orc?

I am **not** an orc, Zammon. And if you think I'm so ugly AND insist on calling me an orc, you know that makes you a racist, right? You're either racist or a genocidal adventurer in the making-- which I can totally appreciate. Note: Yes, I do realize saying "genocidal adventurer" is akin to saying "adventurer adventurer" and is a redundancy redundancy.

Did you make it to [Dungeons & Dragons] 4th Edition?

No, not really. I prefer Pathfinder with Trailblazer dressing. If I want the feel of 4th Edition, I'll go play DDO.

Is Runequest better than D&D?

Seeing as neither are Tunnels & Trolls, I am not forced to think about two inferior game systems (inferior to T&T, I mean). Let's see... I do like the new Runequest better than the new D&D, and I really love old Runequest because it had a great system. Still, nothing tormented poor fools like THAC0 did, and there's something to be said about that. And Dark Sun. So, is Runequest better overall? Yes. Are D&D and all of its incarnations better at belittling your pathetic, meager existence? Yes. I guess they tie, then.

Nobody seems to worship you anymore. How's it feel?

Have you been to Albania lately? Or Burkina Faso? Or Tuvalu? 'Nuff said. I'm awesome; so I feel great. Oh, also, eating people medium rare has really upped my energy levels and has allowed me to garner a few new worshippers. Michelle Bachmann? She's into me. Ahh, yeah. (She even looks kinda like me. Creepy? Sure. But that's how I roll.)

Great questions, Zamm—WAITASEC. Is this the same Zammon Morning Glory who's the son of Xexva Morning Glory?? HOLY POOP. I *so* did your mom. It was pretty sweet, too; but not as sweet as Bachmann building that altar out of goat dung to me. Shelly's such a card... Yes, good times!

Let's move on to some more questions, mors—er, mortals.

Oh Painfully Radiant Infernal Lord,

I really like what I've seen of the 4th edition of GURPS but there is no Vehicles or Robots for this edition yet. I feel these are key resources for setting boundaries for the capabilities of differing TLs and invaluable resources for those of use who want to built hard SF settings but don't have an engineering degree. Perhaps our omniscient lord could tell us if there are plans for 4th edition versions of these at SJG? If not perhaps our omnipotent infernal lord could determine the difficulty of converting technologies designed for the 3rd edition into the 4th?

P.s. I am aware that the gaming community is divided over these supplements but have refrained from a tirade on the subject out of respect for you, my great and powerful lord.

Yours in supplication,

GURPS Wonk

Does TL stand for "Total Loser" in regards to those who play GURPS?

I kid, I kid! Even I'm not *that* cruel. I enjoy GURPS! And how could I not? I love BRP and thus sickening affection for GURPS is not far off from that orgy of awesomeness. Okay, now I have to carefully read your question... Okay... Okay... yes, I see... Hmmm...

“Supplication”? Wonk, you and I need to have a talk about that sometime. Anyways, after the whole debacle of killer robots being stripped out of Warhammer 40,000 a few years back, I swore to myself that stuff of that nature would never go unavenged, unpunished or unfixed. I have sent some Antediluvian Abyssal Flying Squirrels to Steve Jackson’s house (I didn’t tell them which one— two birds, one stone and all that) to set things straight. I don’t have to wait to see what happens to know Steve Jackson and the other hard-working slaves of SJG will come through and produce something along 4th edition robot and vehicle lines. Isn’t this the same company who produced over 700 supplements and settings books for 1st, 2nd and 3rd Edition GURPS? I mean, I have all those 900 books and they are invaluable roleplaying aids for all game systems! I tell you all: It’s worth picking up those 1200 GURPS books. It’s only a matter of time before SJG spits out a decent robot/vehicle book (or books), even if they only go the PDF route. On the difficulty of converting 3rd to 4th edition rules in the nature you speak of, well, it’s not that difficult. Why don’t you take a crack at it yourself, send it my way and I’ll see if it’s what I was thinking of... alright?

And Wonk? I love how you write letters to me. Keep up the great work. I’ll be sure they put up a plaque for you in Ouagadougou’s town plaza.

Hey Dread Lord,

Any musings on the upcoming Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay 3rd edition?

*Keep it peeled,
Barry*

Yes: **KEEP WARHAMMER EVIL**. I have no problem with them turning it into an RPG version of Descent playwise. I’m cool with the trinkets and new foofy dice to cut down on—ARRRRR—pirates. I can live with the character sheets that have slots, tabs, hookers or whatever. But they are going to “make it more heroic”? Please forgive my Gehennens, but **V’KLAK NO**. I also feel for the gamer like me who have bought Every. Single. 2nd. Edition. Book. Those overpriced-yet-gorgeous hardcover suckers which have only been out for a few months in some cases, and at the most have been in print for, what, four years? I would be lying if I said it didn’t feel like being slapped in the face with a stinky mime. At least D&D 3rd edition ran for a few more years and had an enormous amount of material AND had Pathfinder follow it up once the 4th Edition brain-damaged, piss-drunk Ettin was released. I hope great sites like www.strike-to-stun.net , www.warpstone.org , as well as a few others continue to develop excellent fan-created material so we can still keep the gory standard of Hope hoisted high. I’ll admit I’m still curious about 3rd Edition, but it’s obvious to me that FFG aren’t really interested in the Daemon gamer market... I can see many old-school WFRP players freaking out, too. The mere thought may fill me with glee, but that’s only because I’m a sadist in the extreme.

You know, I wonder if the Warhammer Universe would take me and my pals. Ever since Malal (nee Zuvassin) was kicked out and had to crash on my couch for a few weeks, I’ve wondered what it would be like get him back there—with me and a few friends, unnaturally. We could grab Necoho and Melkirth, too! It would be glorious. I’ve always wanted to say something like “Your most powerful Lord Orcus shall rename Nuln to PWND! Now, build me 4756 charnel pits... FOR FREEDOM!!”.

Hey Orcus,

Quick! Name me a good RPG book on the undead that I may not know of!

*Dead Guards,
Skeleton Pete*

UNDEAD from Mayfair’s ROLE AIDS line, released in 1986 AD. It’s a fun book detailing a fun land of unloving fun-lovers. And by “fun” I mean “fun” and “more fun”. Nothing says “fun” and more “fun” like Hoodoo Men and Fear Spiders. Go forth and check it out, you scum! If you can find it, that is.

62 RPG REVIEW ISSUE FIVE September 2009

Dear Lord Orcus,

What would you consider to be one of the best roleplaying books ever released? Aside from standard rulesbooks!

*Eternally,
Natalie*

Well, Natalie, one book which comes to mind right away is Palladium's *Compendium of Weapons and Armor* (and later with *Castles* added to it). You unwashed fools say what ye wish about Palladium and He Who Runs It, but I consider the *Compendium of Weapons and Armor* (in all of its editions) to be absolutely indispensable; especially back in the 1980s and 1990s. Sure, TSR tried with its own book/s, and so did others, but Palladium really hit the nail on the head with this particular tome. The only other RPG book or books that had a drool-worthy listing of weaponry had to be the *Twilight: 2000* gamebooks. Of course, there were many, many other supplements out there in the mists of time that're fantastic and worth mentioning... but you NEED the *Compendium*. It's essential. Hell, even if it's not as crucial anymore—get it, if you don't have it already. I learned that a name for a vicious Japanese poleaxe was “O-NO”. Beautiful. Thanks, *Compendium*, I love you.

Even *with* all those pesky typos.

I seem to remember the *Palladium Fantasy RPG* having incredibly detailed passages on how to summon demons. Ah, sweet bliss.

What's that? Oh, alright then. My favorite kobold-slave, Steve, is informing me that this is all the time we have for now. Thanks for reading, mortal folks, and I hope to see you next time. As for having so more things to gawk at on Ze Intardnets, might I suggest reading what said fave kobold is doing over at <http://www.baconlord.com>. Don't forget that I can always be found at <http://www.orcusville.com>, and perhaps soon maybe Steve will get his lazy ass in gear to put up my “remixed” Chick Tracts I call “Dork Dungeons”. They're a hoot! Until—

Huh?? Oh! And Steve is also begging me to tell you about this Weird War One comic he's writing called *The Secret Cross*, which can currently be found in issues #2 and #3 of the astounding new UK anthology **FTL**. Information on how to get your claws on copies can be found here: <http://www.secretcross.com>

You lot should enjoy **FTL**. Not only does it have Germans hunting down a nasty monster on the battlefields of WWI (Secret Cross), it also has Steve's take on the legend of Roland, Sorgon, and Vikings, girls with guns, more guns, dragons, robots, cheerleaders—you get the idea, I'm sure. It's well worth reading, and I'm not just saying that because I'm having Steve type all of this out.

Can I have extra rations, oh great and mighty Lord?

NO, Steven. Didn't I tell you that food is bad for the immortal soul? Now, type! Then make me a sammich.

Please address correspondence to me through steve@studio-407.com.

Until next time— **STAY HUNGRY**.

Please?
No!
How about now?
Steve, I swear I'm gonna...

63 RPG REVIEW ISSUE FIVE September 2009

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

***Interview with Greg Stafford ... The Evolution of
Glorantha ... From Invisibility to Ignorance ...
HeroQuest2 Review ... Torg HeroQuest ...
D&D/Pathfinder Ancient Dragons of the Bilybara ...
Insectes & Compagnie: Review, Translation, and
Empire of the Ants ... Consensus Reality in RPG
Worlds ... Lord Orcus Listens! ... Mingshi's Industry
News***

GBH

-by Jensen



The three F's of combat:
Flanking, flanking, flanking.